RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND ISLAM : A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF JOHN HICK'S PLURALISTIC HYPOTHESIS

Rifat Atay

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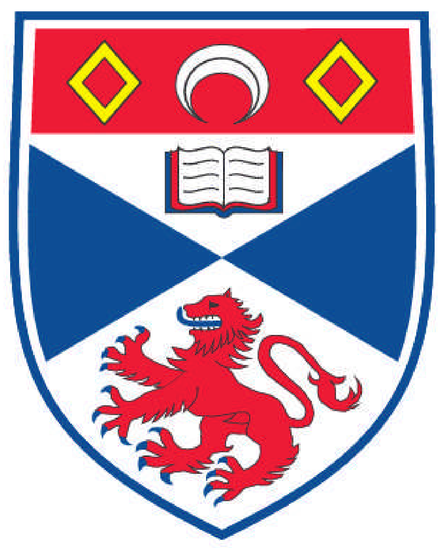

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UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND ISLAM: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF JOHN HICK'S PLURALISTIC HYPOTHESIS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF DIVINITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Rifat ATAY

ST ANDREWS, SCOTLAND, U.K.

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DECLARATIONS

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I was admitted as a research student in November 1995 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in April 1996; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 1995 and 1999.

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ABSTRACT

Rifat Atay

University of St Andrews

Thesis: **"Religious Pluralism and Islam: A Critical Examination of John Hick's Pluralistic Hypothesis"**

This dissertation makes a full critical analysis of John Hick's pluralistic hypothesis (which views great world religions as equally valid ways of salvation/liberation) from an Islamic perspective. To be able to do this, it begins with a survey of Islamic responses to the problem of religious diversity by employing Alan Race's threefold taxonomy (exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism). Chapter one concludes that al-Maturidi's exclusivistic and Ateſl's inclusivistic approaches cannot satisfactorily answer the matter in hand, namely "why a compassionate and loving God should exclude totally or partially the vast majority of human beings from salvation/liberation." Arkoun's pluralistic viewpoint comes closer to Hick's but is incomplete, immature and radically reductionist.

The dissertation, then, starts examining Hick's pluralism. First, it gives an extensive account of pluralism. At the fundamental level, Hick argues for the veridicality of one's experience in order to establish the right of one to believe, which in turn creates the problem of religious diversity: several religions claiming to offer the best way of salvation/liberation. Before putting forward his own theory, Hick examines other naturalistic (Durkheimian and Freudian) and religious (exclusivistic and inclusivistic) accounts of religions. He dismisses them as unsatisfactory and poses his religious interpretation of religion. Drawing the Kantian distinction of noumenon and phenomenon, Hick claims that religions, with their personal gods and impersonal absolutes, are phenomenal responses to the noumenal Real. His soteriological criterion of transformation from "self-centredness to Reality-centredness" contends that great world religions are equally valid ways of salvation/liberation. Since the noumenal Real is totally ineffable, religious language should be understood mythically/metaphorically.

After careful critical consideration, the thesis concludes that Hick's pluralism cannot be compatible with Islam, unless it is modified from three angles: the total ineffability of the Real must be replaced with a "moderate ineffability" (hence *moderate pluralism*), a hermeneutical reading of the holy texts should replace Hick's mythical approach, and Hick's primarily ethical soteriological criterion needs to be extended to include the ritual aspect of religion. This modified version of Hick's pluralism is named "moderate pluralism." The thesis concludes that moderate pluralism is compatible with Islam and offers a way forward particularly in its dealing with other religions.

Abbreviations Used For Hick's Works[1]

AEG	Arguments for the Existence of God.
AIR	An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent.
BS	Body and the Soul
CAC	Christianity at the Centre.
CCR	Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Religion.
COC	The Centre of Christianity.
COR	Christianity and Other Religions: Selected Readings.
DEL	Death and Eternal Life.
DQ	Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion.
EG	The Existence Of God
EGL	Evil and the God of Love.
ERD	The Experience of Religious Diversity.
FD	The Fifth Dimension.
FK	Faith and Knowledge.
FP	Faith and the Philosophers.
GHMN	God Has Many Names: Britain's New Religious Pluralism.
GST	Gandhi's Significance for Today.
GUF	God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion.
MCU	The Myth of Christian Uniqueness.
MEGI	The Metaphor of God Incarnate.
MFA	The Many-Faced Argument.
MYGI	The Myth of God Incarnate.
POR	The Philosophy of Religion.
PRP	Problems of Religious Pluralism.
ROF	The Rainbow of Faiths: Critical Dialogues on Religious Pluralism.
SC	The Second Christianity.
TD	Truth and Dialogue: The Relationship between World Religions.
TFOG	Three Faiths - One God: A Jewish, Christian, Muslim Encounter.
WBG	Why Believe in God?

[1] Full publication details can be found in the bibliography.

Introduction

Despite the implications of John Hick's pluralistic hypothesis for Islam (for instance, in matters of religious language and theology) few studies have examined, from an Islamic perspective, the status of the hypothesis in an Islamic context. In this thesis, therefore, I offer a critical examination of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis from an Islamic viewpoint. Hick views religions as cognitive totalities which are all equally effective in transforming human beings to a better state of being through their salvational/liberational methods. Throughout my study, this is what I will be calling *the pluralistic option*. My aim is to study Hick's thesis thoroughly to see whether, from an Islamic standpoint, it offers a viable way of accounting for the diversity of religions. In order to do this, I will first give an extensive critical account of the pluralistic option and then eventually reproduce a modified version of it as a workable thesis. Finally, I shall test this modified version against the Islamic milieu, highlight possible problems and offer solutions for them.

The conflicting truth-claims of different religions and, in particular, their diverse approaches to the concept of salvation pose an immensely difficult problem both for the followers of particular religions and for philosophers of religion. Almost every religion claims that its followers can reach, in Hick's hybrid term, "salvation/liberation" through its teachings and way of life, while other ways are regarded either as insufficient for this purpose or partly or totally in the dark. Thus the question must be faced whether all these conflicting claims to truth, which are claimed to derive from the same source, the Ultimate Reality, could be true at the same time. If not, the question arises whether any particular claim has a privileged position, or whether none is ultimately justifiable.

More practically, one could argue that religion still plays a significant role in many international and political problems, as it did in the past. The primary reason for some of today's conflicts often appears to be religious intolerance. The Palestinians and the Israelis in the Middle East, and the Bosnians, Croats and Serbs in Europe are cases in point. If, therefore, we reach a consensus between various religious traditions, we could perhaps ease or avoid similar difficulties in the future. As Hans Küng puts it, "no world peace without peace between the religions."[1] Thus one could conclude that one of the most urgent, if not the only, problem facing philosophers of religion today is that of accounting religious diversity, bearing in mind the cognitivity and originality of religions.

The number of theories dealing with the question of the plurality of religions have gradually increased from the nineteenth century onwards. There are naturalistic explanations for religion (Ludwig Feuerbach, Emil Durkheim and Sigmund Freud) on the one hand and religious or theological explanations on the other (in Christianity, for instance, those of Hendrik Kraemer, Karl Rahner, Ernst Troeltsch, W. Cantwell Smith and John Hick).

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[1] Küng, H, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, trans. Bowden, J, London: SCM Press, 1991, xv, 71ff.

As I stated at the outset, my main concern in this dissertation will be the examination of Hick's pluralism from within an Islamic perspective, since pluralism appears to offer a better and more comprehensive understanding of religious diversity. What do we mean by a "better and more comprehensive account of religious diversity?" As a Muslim, I believe that we are born with religious sensibilities which are mostly shaped by the societies into which we are born. Thus, I believe Hick is right in saying that a great majority of human beings are religious according to the "accident of birth:" one becomes a Christian because one is born into a Christian society, and the same applies to a Muslim, a Buddhist, a Hindu, etc. Conversions and other religious or irreligious choices are exceptions as far as the accident of birth is concerned. Thus to confine (as in exclusivism) or reserve primarily (as in inclusivism) salvation/liberation to the adherents of a particular religion seems incompatible with the fundamental Muslim belief in an all-loving, compassionate and merciful Ultimate Being. It would mean ruling out the opportunity of salvation for the majority of humankind on the basis of geographical and cultural differences which they have no hand in. Moreover, theoretically speaking, Islam accepts plurality not particularity (exclusivism or inclusivism) as a general principle; i.e. the religious situation of the universe is deliberately designed to be pluralistic. Therefore, every human being should be included in a salvational/liberational scheme, if there ever could be one, regardless of one's religious affiliation, as long as one is a good human being who strives for the betterment of humanity. That is to say, as long as one lives by the *Golden Rule* ("it is good to benefit others and evil to harm them")[2], which is common to the great world religions. This is what pluralism means, and for this reason it might probably constitute a better and more comprehensive understanding of religious diversity.

I now turn to the question: why study religious pluralism and Islam? Firstly, as I said in the opening lines, Hick's hypothesis has serious implications for Islam as a religion claiming to have absolute truth as traditionally understood. In fact, some scholars have jumped to quick conclusions to celebrate Hick's works as the announcement of the end of Christian particularity, on the one hand, and the beginning of the acceptance of Islam's final truth, on the other. I refer to this as "the Islamisation of Christianity" or any other religion for that matter.[3] Such was the excitement of Abdus-Samad Sharafuddin of King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah, for instance, in the aftermath of *The Myth of God Incarnate*.[4] Sharafuddin praises "the rightly guided authors of *The Myth*," for they want "all Christians to become one God worshippers,"[5] which of course is the call of Islam,

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[2] *AIR*, 313-314, 316.

[3] I always get the same "this is Islam" reply from friends when I tell them about Hick's thoughts about Christ and Incarnation as metaphorical truths, thus the name "Islamisation." However, when I tell them about his thoughts about Islam and other religions, they feel rather disappointed.

[4] Hick, J, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate*, London: SCM Press and Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977.

[5] Cohn-Sherbok, D, *"Incarnation and Trialogue,"* in Islam in a World of Diverse Faiths, ed. D Cohn-Sherbok, London: Macmillan, 1991, 18 (cited from Sharafuddin, A, *About the Myth of God Incarnate-An Impartial Survey of its Main Topics*, Jeddah: King Abdul Aziz University Press, 1978, ii).

primarily for Christians and Jews[6] and then the rest of humanity.[7] He also describes the book "like a rational, godsend lightning [that] strikes the London horizon to explode an agelong blunder in Christian thought."[8] However, since probably Sharafuddin was not aware of Hick's earlier work in "the Copernican Revolution in Theology,"[9] which does not recognise an absolute religion including Islam, he in the end attempts to prove the Qur'anic truth against the already-falsified Christian truth in order to "win converts to Islam."[10] Thus, instead of "polemical attempts to win converts to Islam"[11] in the light of Hick's critical work about the Christian doctrines, Muslims, I believe, should study Hick's thought in its entirety more closely, because its conclusions are as much related to Islam or any other religion as they are to Christianity.

Secondly, at a personal level, the question of religious diversity has always been both an existential and an intellectual one for me. As a Muslim, since my early childhood I would wonder why Allah[12] allows others to remain outside the circle of Islam. By *"others"* here, I refer to the followers of all other religions. Despite the fact that I used seriously to worry about this question, I never had any opportunity to discover a convincing answer to it during my formal education. Sociologically speaking, Christians and Jews received a different treatment within Islamic societies than non-believers because, it was assumed, they shared the same belief in one God despite their different understandings of it. However, theologically speaking, both Jews and Christians were also projected as infidels, or as deluded. Hence, in addition to Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jews and Christians were part of my problem too when I thought about the universal salvific will or saving grace of Allah.

Traditionally, there are certain ways of thinking developed, sustained and followed by Muslims with regard to "others." In fact I would say Islam has been sociologically inclusivist, eschatologically exclusivist and politically pluralist in its relations towards other religions. The Sufis' pluralistic line (similar to Hick's) has never been a popular choice either theologically or philosophically. Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians have been treated differently from other traditions in legal terms, but eschatologically, like the followers of other religions, they were deemed not to be saved either. When I as a Muslim looked at the history of Islam, occupying a period of more than fourteen centuries, I saw at best less than half the world's population saved, given optimistic calculations. That is to say, if we consider the inclusivist view that some Jews and Christians are also saved in addition to Muslims. What of the rest? Some Muslims maintain tentatively that we will never know for

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[6] *The Qur'an* 3:64.
[7] *The Qur'an* 34:28.
[8] Cohn-Sherbok, *"Incarnation and Trialogue,"* 18 (cited from Sharafuddin, *About the Myth of God Incarnate*, i).
[9] *GUF*, 12-132.
[10] Cohn-Sherbok, *"Incarnation and Trialogue,"* 19.
[11] Cohn-Sherbok, *"Incarnation and Trialogue,"* 19.
[12] Subsequently, I shall use mostly *Allah* when I talk about the Muslim notion of God rather than God or the Real.

sure: Allah knows best and we hope for his mercy towards them. The majority, inclined to take an exclusivist approach, remark that they will go to the eternal fire of hell.

In Islam, the literature on pluralism is so small as to be marginal compared to Christian writings. Despite the pluralistic character of Islam, it is unfortunate for Muslims to discover that contemporary Islamic pluralist literature was inaugurated by non-Muslim pluralists, such as Hick[13] and like-minded others,[14] apart from a few other individuals writing rarely on the subject.[15]

When I first came across Hick's writings during my MA studies, I felt that, despite having certain drawbacks like any other hypothesis, he was stating what I was waiting to hear, particularly on the philosophical front. I have since become aware of the fact that Hick's name has been synonymous with religious pluralism since the 1980s and that many studies of his version of religious pluralism have been carried out in different parts of the world, especially the English speaking world.[16] This was firstly because Hick wrote as a Christian, in English, which made him accessible to many people. Secondly and more importantly, Hick's hypothesis relativised Christ, limiting Jesus' role as saviour to Christians only. Therefore Christians felt obliged to respond to Hick's hypothesis. However, despite the similar importance of pluralism for Islam, very little work has been done from an Islamic perspective to test the reliability of Hick's hypothesis within an Islamic environment. I was puzzled to discover only one comparative study done from an Islamic standpoint.[17] The work in question looks at the issues from a traditionalist point of view,[18] possibly due to the influence on its author of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an Islamic scholar whose ideas are compared to Hick's. Thus Aslan ignores the modernist, or less orthodox, works of Muhammad Abduh and his disciple Rashid Rida, two modernist Egyptian commentators from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and of Mahmoud M Ayoub and Mohammed Arkoun, two contemporary Muslim pluralists. More astonishingly, despite his Turkish origin, Aslan never refers to the heated dispute in Turkey between Süleyman Ateş, an inclusivist, and Talat Koçyiğit and other exclusivist Turkish scholars in the late '80s and early '90s. We cannot, I believe, be content with the traditionalist line, if we seek a satisfactory and comprehensive Islamic response to pluralism. Therefore we must go beyond the traditionalist circle and consider other, alternative but equally valid, voices from the modernist and pluralist strands of Islam. This is what I hope to achieve in this study.

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[13] Hick, J and H Askari, eds., *The Experience of Religious Diversity*, Hants, England and Brookfield, Vermont, Gower Publishing, 1985.
[14] Cohn-Sherbok, D, ed., *Islam in a World of Diverse Faiths*, London, Macmillan, 1991.
[15] For example, Fazlur Rahman, Ismail R Faruqi, Mahmoud Ayoub and S. H. Nasr
[16] Just to have an idea, one could quote the figures up to 1993: 18 doctoral theses and six full-length books (Badham, P, *"The Life and Work of John Hick,"* in God, Truth and Reality: Essays in Honour of John Hick, A Sharma, ed., New York, St Martin's Press, 1993, 5). Since then, to my knowledge, two books, both reworked doctoral dissertations, have been added to this list.
[17] Aslan, A, *Ultimate Reality and Its Manifestations in the Writings of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, Lancaster: Lancaster University, PhD, 1995.
[18] Aslan, *Ultimate Reality*, 4.

Before beginning to lay out the chapters of my thesis, I would like to say a word about the scope of the project. I restrict my study of religions in this thesis to Christianity and Islam only and will not be going into detailed discussion of other religions except where they are either raised by Hick or absolutely necessary to make my point. This restriction is based on three reasons. In the first place, Hick is a Christian and uses frequently Christian materials; I am a Muslim and rely on Islamic materials which enable me to judge Hick's hypothesis more easily. In the second place, Christianity and Islam are in some respects similar in their approach to the question of religious diversity. That is to say, despite the general implications of the diversity of religions for all the world religions, Christianity and Islam felt the problem more acutely because of their traditional exclusive claims to truth and salvation. For Christianity, exclusivity came in the form of a commitment to belief in Jesus Christ as God Incarnate, and in Islam it took the form of the Qur'an as the final and conclusive revelation of God. Thirdly, both are theistic religions which broadly resemble each other in many ways and share some common features. Therefore it makes sense to apply Hick's thesis, which arises from objections to Christian exclusivism, to a religion which is so like Christianity in many ways.

The dissertation consists of five chapters: (1) *Islam and Other Religions*, which briefly describes the problem and gives a summary of three attempts by Islamic scholars to deal with religious diversity, (2) *The Need for a Pluralistic Hypothesis*, which explains how Hick arrived at his pluralistic hypothesis (3) *Religious Pluralism,* which gives a full account of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, (4) *A Critique of the Pluralistic Hypothesis,* which presents problems associated with Hick's pluralism and discusses them at length, and (5) *Moderate Pluralism and Islam,* which reproduces a modified workable version of Hick's pluralism and tests its viability for an Islamic context.

The first chapter, *Islam and Other Religions*, prepares the ground for Hick's pluralistic hypothesis by providing a short description of the wider problem and discussing possible attempts to solve it from an Islamic perspective. After a brief discussion of why a new outlook is needed in the study of religions and their relations to each other, I move on to examine the commonly offered *religious* solutions to the problem of religious diversity from a Muslim perspective. In this respect, as a first attempt by a Muslim within an Islamic context, I use the threefold typology of Alan Race, *exclusivism, inclusivism,* and *pluralism* to test the claims of the exponents of the typology that, besides Christianity, it can also be successfully applied to any other tradition in order to examine its attitude towards other traditions. Additionally, despite certain problems regarding its appropriateness, Hick and others writing in this area also employ it commonly in their work, which makes it convenient to follow throughout the thesis. *Exclusivism* maintains that there is only one certain way of salvation; others ways, though they may include traces of truth, do not lead to salvation. As an example of this outlook within Islam, I will examine the thought of al-Maturidi (d. 333/944).[19] *Inclusivism* accepts that there is more than one way of salvation,

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[19] Dates refer, respectively, to the Islamic, *Hijri*, lunar and the Gregorian solar calendars.

but claims one is better than others, and in some sense defining for salvation. This view is represented by the work of Süleyman Ateﬂ. *Pluralism* holds that all great world religions are equally effective in offering salvation. I will study the work of Muhammad Arkoun, as an Islamic example. These three stances, of which exclusivism has been the dominant in many cases, can be witnessed across many religions with different intonations, though I will be dealing only with Muslim instances, since my concern is only Hick's thesis and Islam. Neither of the Muslim scholars refers to or is aware of the typology, but I believe the traces of each paradigm can be seen in all three, as I shall demonstrate shortly. The Christian exclusivist and inclusivist attitudes will be dealt with briefly towards the end of the second chapter, when I discuss Hick's criticism of these options.

I will conclude in this chapter that our new contemporary religious situation really requires us to reconsider the relationship between religions. In this context, Race's typology could be a useful tool in analysing Islamic attitudes towards other traditions. It will demonstrate that, on the one hand, exclusivist and inclusivist approaches do not offer plausible options and are unsuccessful in accounting for the universal salvific will of the Divine. On the other hand, while Arkoun's pluralistic approach takes into account the possibility of universal salvation, it is too secularist, reductionist and historicist. This will lead us to consider Hick's hypothesis which, I believe, with a few modifications may constitute a better explanation of the religious phenomena.

In chapter two, *The Need for a Pluralistic Hypothesis*, I follow Hick's arguments as to why we need a new hypothesis of religions. The chapter will explain the steps upon which Hick founds his thesis. The first step is "the right to believe." Here, starting from the veridicality of one's experience, I establish the justifiability of experiencing the world around us religiously. This basic trust in one's experience leads to the observation that there are different accounts of experiencing the world religiously, what Hick calls "the directory of Gods." This plurality of religions, Hick suggests, calls for some explanation. Before producing his own views, he first evaluates the existing solutions to the problem, which I summarise under the title of "The Interpretations." Following Hick, we examine various interpretations of the plurality of religions from *naturalistic* and *religious* or confessional perspectives and the reasons why Hick considers these to be unsatisfactory. With regard to naturalistic accounts, we look at Freud's psychological and Durkheim's sociological accounts of religion and Hick's critique of them. I present Hick's criticism of the religious explanations, exclusivism and inclusivism, dubbed as "*the particularistic theories*," in two steps. The first brief step is his critique of classical responses, which Hick names "Ptolemaic epicycles," referring to Ptolemy's efforts to save the incorrect picture of the universe before Copernicus' theory. The second considers a recent discussion Hick had with contemporary Christian exponents of exclusivism and inclusivism. This updated defence of these positions will illustrate both how Hicks' hypothesis has been received by modern day Christians and proves Hick's point that whatever way they are stretched, the traditional responses are finally inadequate.

Hick concludes that naturalistic explanations fail because they do not respect the realist claims of religion. He does not claim that the naturalistic interpretations are necessarily wrong, a claim which Hick thinks is at present undemonstratable, but that they are unsatisfactory in that they fail to give a comprehensive account of the phenomenon of religion. Religious explanations, on the other hand, cannot account for the fact that an all-loving and compassionate God leaves the majority of the population either totally or partially in the dark through no fault of their own. Having considered all the previous options, we conclude that a new hypothesis is needed in order to explain "the new religious disposition of the universe of faiths." Thus we come to Hick's pluralistic hypothesis.

In chapter three, *Religious Pluralism*, I give a comprehensive account of Hick's view. Here I consider how Hick developed his thesis, looking initially at the issue from a Christological perspective, hence the title "a Christian theology of religions." For him the problem started out as that of how to understand Christology and where to place Christ's role as saviour in a religiously plural world. I list his objections to traditional Christology and arrive at his "Copernican revolution in theology," according to which the Incarnation should be understood metaphorically rather than literally. This results in viewing Jesus as *a* saviour among many, and the claim that a Christian theology of religions should be theocentric (God-centred) not Christocentric (Christ-centred). Hick, however, did not stop there and moved forward to develop his pluralistic hypothesis of religions. He now called it a *philosophy* not *theology* of religions, and gave a comprehensive account of major world religions by applying the Kantian epistemological distinction between *noumenon* and *phenomenon* to the religious epistemology. Here we observe how Hick postulates an *ineffable noumenal Real* as the ground of all religious experiences, and locates the great religions of the world as we know them as *phenomenal responses to that noumenal Real.* At the phenomenal level, God and the Absolute constitute different categories, which are schematised by us as personal and impersonal respectively, resulting in seemingly incompatible conceptions of the phenomenal Real. In fact these different conceptions do not conflict, since they exist only at the phenomenal level and do not apply to the noumenal Real itself. In this Kantian model, Christology has ceased to be the starting point for Hick. His discussion focuses on the more philosophical issue of how to understand the phenomenon of diverse religions, their claims to truth and their attitudes to salvation. Finally in this chapter, I turn to examine Hick's understanding of religious language as myth/metaphor and his soteriological criterion of "salvation/liberation as human transformation."

In addition to brief criticisms of Hick offered here and there in the previous chapters, I felt a separate chapter was needed for a fuller critique of Hick's hypothesis. Hence chapter four, *A Critique of the Pluralistic Hypothesis,* is devoted entirely to a critique of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis. Various criticisms of Hick are grouped under three headings. Firstly, I will deal with the claims that, contrary to Hick's assertions of comprehensiveness and non-confessionalism, he is heavily dependant on Western culture and philosophy; i.e. that his view is confessional, reduces religions to only ethical packages, and that it is finally

reductionist and non-comprehensive. Secondly, I examine problems associated with the postulation of a totally ineffable noumenal Real and its eventual redundancy. Finally, Hick's criterion of salvation/liberation as human transformation and its ability to account for the diverse methods and aims of religions will be discussed. I will conclude that some charges are irrelevant, while others constitute serious objections, and Hick's thesis consequently needs some modification.

Chapter five, *Moderate Pluralism and Islam*, will be the decisive chapter in which I begin by constructing a modified version of Hick's pluralism, taking account of the relevant objections. I shall call this modified version "moderate soteriological pluralism" (derived from the "moderate ineffability of the noumenal Real" and the soteriological efficacy of the great world religions). However, for the sake of brevity, I will refer to it mostly as "moderate pluralism" and, from time to time, as "Hick's modified pluralism," since I retain certain elements of Hick's hypothesis in my modification. I then deal with the possible implications of this moderate pluralism for Islam, and the likely responses of Islam to these implications. In developing his hypothesis, Hick focuses on five great world religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Throughout his pluralistic writing, first, he gathers evidence from these traditions to prove the viability of his hypothesis and then tests it against these five religions to assert that his hypothesis is supported by them and, consequently, gives a better account of them. That is to say: it respects their realistic claims, unlike the naturalistic account of religion as delusion, and gives a comprehensive explanation of them as realities revolving around the Ultimate Reality, rather than revolving, exclusively or specifically, around a religious tradition, as portrayed by exclusivism and inclusivism respectively. This is an important claim to make, yet, as Hick acknowledges, substantiating it is not an easy task. Thus its validity for other religions, as a comprehensive philosophical thesis, has to be tested by the members of the religions for which Hick thinks his thesis works. This has already been done from a Christian perspective by many, and is what I will be doing in the final chapter from a Muslim perspective using a modified version of Hick's hypothesis.

In my modification of Hick's hypothesis, I focus my attention on three points: i) against his reductionist mythical/metaphorical approach towards religious language, I call for a "hermeneutical approach"; ii) against Hick's total ineffability of the noumenal Real, I argue for a "moderate ineffability"; and iii) I believe the scope of his soteriological criterion needs to be widened by Dan Cohn-Sherbok's "viability principle." When I move to the Islamic context, I deal with four primary concerns. I address, firstly, the paramount question of reconciling the strict monotheistic faith of Islam and the validity of the different religions argued by Hick? "The principle of plurality," as attested by the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions, leads the solution here. Next I deal with the verses carry an apparently exclusivist tendency, which brings us to the prophethood Muhammad and the question of salvation. The third important point is "freedom of religion" and law of apostasy as understood and applied to the Other (especially the people of the Book). Finally in this chapter, I demonstrate the workability of hermeneutical understanding of the Qur'an in the

example of *kufr* (unbelief). I conclude first that this modified version of Hick's hypothesis is compatible with Islam. Secondly, from an Islamic perspective, the diversity of religions understood in this way does not pose a threat to religious cognitivity. Finally, Hick's modified pluralistic hypothesis might contribute positively to the interreligious dialogue and peace, which may in the long run benefit world peace a lot.

A note on Islamic terminology: throughout my study, I differentiate between the wider, literal, meaning of *islam*, i.e. submission to the will of God (and its noun form a *muslim*, a submitter) and the colloquial use of it in a limited sense as the name of the institutionalised religion, *Islam* (and its noun form as commonly known a *Muslim*). I shall use "islam/muslim" without a capital "i" or "m" to refer to the state of total submission to the will of God and the one who submits, and "Islam/Muslim" with a capital "I" or "M" to denote the Islamic religion and one who follows it. I use God and Allah synonymously.

Since I operate within a certain time limit, I will engage with Hick's academic material up to and including May '99.

I shall refer to Hick's works in abbreviated forms which will be given at the beginning of the thesis, unless the work is an article, in which case I will give the full details where I first mention it. Other works will be cited in the order of the author's surname, book, place of publication, publisher and date published, and given directly beneath the pages where they are first quoted. In the articles, I follow the order of surname, title, journal followed by volume no, issue and date, if available. Subsequently, I use a short name for the book or the article beside the author's surname. Full details can be found in the bibliography, which has been divided into two parts: one for Hick's works and the other for the rest.

For Qur'anic quotations, I use *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran,* M. M. Pickthall translation[20] with minor modifications where necessary.[21] For Biblical quotations, I follow *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha,* joint committee translation.[22] For a Prophetic tradition (*hadith*) quotation, I give the name of the collection, chapter it appears, and *hadith* number, e.g. *Muslim*, the Book of Faith, hadith no: 1235.

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[20] London: Everyman, 1992.
[21] From time to time, I also quote a translation of a specific verse by an author, particularly, if it is a preferred one by the author to make his point.
[22] Oxford, OUP & CUP, 1970.

CHAPTER ONE

1. ISLAM AND OTHER RELIGIONS

"Don't forget the nut, being so proud of the shell,
The body has its inward ways,
the five senses. They crack open,
and the Friend is revealed.
Crack open the Friend, you become
the All-One."
Jalal al-Din Rûmî[1]

1.1. Introduction

My aim in this chapter is to give a brief description of the problem of religious diversity and discuss three possible solutions produced from Islamic perspectives. To this end I shall consider and then employ Alan Race's threefold framework of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. To my knowledge, this will be the first attempt to analyse Islamic attitudes towards other religions by using Race's typology. I will examine one Muslim scholar's ideas to exemplify each of these categories: al-Maturidi, Süleyman Ateş and Mohammed Arkoun respectively. Even though the threefold typology is not commonly used in Islamic pluralist literature, I shall test its appropriateness for assessing Islamic responses to religious diversity. Since the typology is frequently employed by Hick to evaluate Christian responses to other religions, it might be a useful tool understand Islamic attitudes before moving into Hick's context. The Muslim exclusivist and inclusivist solutions will also serve as a case study for Hick's assumptions about Christian exclusivist and inclusivist responses that they are inadequate to deal with the problem. Lastly in this chapter, I study Arkoun's thought as a possible case in pluralism, which is close to Hick's position in some points and better in some. But over all it is unsatisfactory.

1.2. A Brief Historical Background

Historically speaking many of the religions have been in contact with each other throughout the centuries. If we take the theistic religions, for instance, Judaism, Christianity and Islam have confronted each other almost from the start, and have had bitter-sweet experiences of each other since they have all arisen in the same part of the world, i.e. the Middle East. But opportunity for genuine dialogue and mutual understanding was rarely possible before the seventeenth century. This was due to the dominance of certain religions in particular regions of the world both culturally and politically. Once such dominance asserted itself, the dominant tradition considered itself the truest religion and felt the hand of God upon itself, while subordinate religions

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[1] Rumi, J al-D, *Unseen Rain: Quatrains of Rumi*, trans. Moyne, J and C Barks, Putney, Vermont: Threshold, 1986, 19.

"formed a negative image" of the other as a defence mechanism[2] and hoped the help of God would be with it soon.

However, the situation changed during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries when the European Enlightenment took place. The Enlightenment brought with itself the authority of reason to solve problems, and was "extremely critical of traditional organized Christianity."[3] This was followed by the development of anthropological studies, whereby Western civilisation came to recognise that there were other civilisations and religions very different from its own. Three elements have helped the rapid spread of this discovery: (i) the increasing number of anthropological books about the world religions available for public consumption, (ii) the journeys made to countries by Westerners as observers of those religions, and (iii) the massive immigrations from the East to the West after the second World War which promoted a better understanding through personal and familial relations. Hick thinks that immigration was the most important factor in the development of consciousness of other religions in the West, which was in fact the main determinant igniting his interest in the subject after his move to Birmingham.[4] One could add to these the recent important developments in communications technology from newspapers to telephone, radio, television and lately the internet and e-mail. These turned the world into what is commonly described as a "global village."[5] Therefore, the days when "religion" was associated only with one's own religion had passed and people were faced more acutely with the question of other religions. Put another way, no religion can progress any further by ignoring others, as happened in the past. As Gordon D Kaufman states clearly:

> "We have become interconnected with each other in countless ways... Although culturally we are increasingly aware both of our diversity and of our interdependence, the meaning of this for our religious institutions and traditions, and for our religious self-understandings, has barely begun to dawn upon us. It is important, however, that we find new and more adequate ways to think about both the diversity and the interconnectedness of our human religiousness, if our various religious heritages are to contribute positively to the building of a world in which we, in all our differences, can live together productively and in peace... We need a way to understand our religiousness which can honour the integrity and meaning of each of the great religious traditions and yet open them to appreciation of and reconciliation with each other"[6]

Thus we have to find new ways of understanding each other compatible with "both the diversity and the interconnectedness of our human religiousness." This certainly makes the problem of religious diversity a more urgent one.

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[2] Watt, W M, *Religious Truth for Our Time*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1995, 89-90.
[3] Watt, *Religious Truth*, 85.
[4] *ROF*, 13.
[5] Watt, *Religious Truth*, 84.
[6] Kaufman, G D, *"Religious Diversity and Religious Truth,"* in God, Truth and Reality: Essays in Honour of John Hick, ed. Sharma, A, New York: St Martin's Press, 1993, 148.

Despite the general implications of awareness of other religions and of the confrontation with them for all the great world religions, Christianity and Islam felt the problem more acutely because of their particularly exclusive claims to truth and salvation which also made them "missionary faiths."[7] For Christianity, exclusivity came in the form of Jesus as God Incarnate and in Islam, it took the form of the Qur'an as the final and conclusive revelation of God.[8] Just to clear misperceptions, it is worth noting that the comparison should be not between Muhammad and Jesus but between Jesus as the God incarnate and the Qur'an as the binding, final message of God.[9] Because the Qur'an "as God's word inlibrate, occupies in Islam the same place that Christ as God's word incarnate in Christianity."[10] From the nineteenth century onwards we observe a gradual increase in the study of other religions in the Christian world, resulting in the production of several theories and books, ranging from naturalistic (e.g. Ludwig Feuerbach and Emil Durkheim), to exclusivist (e.g. Hendrik Kraemer and Karl Barth), inclusivist (e.g. Karl Rahner) and pluralist (e.g. Ernst Troeltsch, Wilfred C Smith and Keith Ward) accounts of religions.

Islam's relationship with other religions has always been a complex one. During the Meccan period, in the early years, it confronted the pagan Arabs. Muslims were also aware of Christians and were on good terms with them. In fact, when Muhammad first received the divine revelation his wife Khadija took him to her relative Waraqa bin Nawfal, "who had some knowledge of the Bible and may have been a Christian."[11] Waraqa reassured Muhammad that what he experienced was similar to what had happened to Moses and was a divine revelation.[12] When the number of Muslims increased in Mecca and they were persecuted by the Meccans, "the Negus of Abyssinia, who ruled over a Christian kingdom"[13] gave them refuge and accepted a group of emigrant Muslims into his country in 615/616 CE, who were followed by a second group of emigrants in 618? CE.[14] The pagan Meccans sent two delegates to the Negus who argued in front of him for the "extradition" of Muslims[15] on the grounds that Muslims neither liked Christians nor respected Christianity. But the king refused the deportation of Muslims[16] after listening to what Muslims had to say about Jesus as a major prophet.[17]

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[7] Carey, G, *"Christianity and Islam: Building Dialogue,"* Dialogue , October 1996, 4.
[8] Smith, W C, *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies*, The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1981, 238-239; Schoun, F, *Understanding Islam*, trans. Matheson, DM, London: Unwin/Mandala, 1976, 52.
[9] Schoun, *Understanding Islam*, 87.
[10] Schimmel, A, *"The Muslim Tradition,"* in The World's Religious Traditions, ed. F Whaling, Edinburgh: T & T Clark: 1984, 133.
[11] Watt, W M, *A Short History of Islam*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1996, 13.
[12] Watt, *A Short History of Islam*, 13.
[13] Bodley, R V C, *The Messenger: The Life of Mohammed*, London: Robert Hale, 1946, 6.
[14] Bodley, *The Messenger*, 74, 80; Watt, W M, *What is Islam?*, London: Longmans and Beirut: Librairie du Liban: 1968, 97, 99-100.
[15] Hamidullah, D M, *Introduction to Islam*, Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1981, 171.
[16] Probably because of this and other affinities between Christianity and Islam, the Qur'an 5:82 declares that "the nearest of them in affection to those who believe (to be) those who say: Lo! We are Christians. That is because there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not proud." Bodley writes that "the Abyssinians were Nestorian Christians and tolerant to other creeds"

Furthermore, we observe that as soon as the Prophet settled in Madina, he signed a pact with the Jews. The treaty recognised all inhabitants of Madina, regardless of their religion, as equally good members of the community, declared the freedom of practice of religion and guaranteed mutual protection for both sides against any outside attack. Furthermore the Qur'an attests that Muslims are allowed to eat the food of the people of the Book, *ahl al-kitab* (Jews and Christians) and the marriages formed with them are valid,[18] which gave them direct acceptance to the Muslim society. It is also compulsory for Muslims to believe and accept all the prophets sent and the books revealed before Muhammad.[19] This resulted, as we shall see later in detail, in harmonious and civilised plural religious communities as witnessed in Spain under Muslim rule, in Baghdad during the Abbasides, and lately in the Ottoman Empire.[20] It was so harmonious that, as H. A. R. Gibb puts it nicely, "to the peoples of the conquered countries the Arab supremacy signified at first little more than a change of masters. There was no breach in the continuity of their life and social institutions, no persecution, no forced conversion."[21]

Despite all these positive signs, there are also verses in the Qur'an which severely criticise both Jews and Christians especially on their failure to uphold the Oneness of God, *tawhid*, and to preserve their scripture from distortion. At times the verses are so harsh as to describe some of the *ahl al-kitab*, the people of the Book, as "infidels." There are also verses defining Islam as the final and full religion for all humanity and stating that no other religion will be accepted from anybody else.[22] This and other evidence put together by conservative scholars brought forward a very exclusive aspect of Islam, as a result of which not only other religious followers but also different Muslim denominations suffered. Historically, one might suggest that Islamic societies have always been more pluralistic and generally treated their fellow religionists better than Christian societies. In other words, "Islam may perhaps be said to have been more successful than Christianity in dealing with cultural differences."[23] However, theologically speaking Muslims were and still are mostly exclusivists, except for some Sufis, who argued for pluralism but were never accepted among the mainstream of Islamic thought. The main reasons for this exclusivist tendency are (i) other scriptures

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(74). He also points out that "while the Abyssinians had the deepest respect for Mohammed and what he stood for, they were already Nestorian Christians whose fundamental beliefs differed little from those of the Moslems" (263).

[17] Armstrong, K, *Muhammad: A Western Attempt to Understand Islam*, London: Victor Gollancz Ltd: 1992, 122-23.

[18] *The Qur'an* 5:5. Nevertheless the jurists did not favour marrying Muslim girls to ahl al-kitab because of the heavy impact of the father on children. They also insisted that the children should be brought up as Muslims, if one of the parents is Muslim regardless of who it is. These and other factors, I suggest, pushed Muslims towards a more exclusivistic attitude to others.

[19] *The Qur'an* 2:285.

[20] Gibb, H A R, *Mohammedanism: An Historical Survey*, London and New York: OUP, 1957, 3-5.

[21] Gibb, H A R, *Mohammedanism*, 4.

[22] *The Qur'an* 3:19, 85.

[23] Watt, *Religious Truth for Our Time*, 82.

were all held to be distorted and (ii) Islam and the Qur'an abrogated all other forms of religion. They might lead one to somewhere, but, it was maintained, none is as good as Islam because it is the most well-preserved, the surest and the purest of them. As will be seen shortly, some exclusivists also hold that (iii) one has to accept the message of Muhammad in order to be saved. As an indication of theological exclusivism, one need only mention, as Smith rightly observes, the division of the society into Muslims and non-Muslims (*ghayr Muslim*).[24] Thus, as in Christianity, despite good examples in certain periods, Islam failed to develop a more positive and pluralist attitude towards other religions. This is so especially in the twentieth century, probably because of the increasing tension between the East and the West and of the dominance of the Western culture and outlook in many parts of the world, in addition to bitter memories of colonialism. The lack of a world power among the Muslim nations today has made them more and more conservative and defensive of the superiority of their religion. This trend has now started to change, but it is still in its infancy compared to Christianity. I shall now try to trace these different attitudes and illustrate them in Islam, starting from the more traditionalist approach, exclusivism, to the more moderate, inclusivism, and to the more tolerant approach, pluralism.

1.3. Three Approaches to Other Religions -Race's Typology

The typology was first introduced by Alan Race in his book *Christians and Religious Pluralism* to classify Christian responses to other religions.[25] Race does not give precise definitions of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism at first. He rather states that it is adopted as a "broad typological framework" which can accommodate "most of the current Christian theologies of religions." Regarding the flexibility of the typology, he writes:

> "Each heading contains within it a number of different options or variations of a theoretical type, and the differences between these variations are largely a matter of emphasis on the part of the particular writers concerned. The general theoretical type indicated by each heading remains the constant factor which warrants the inclusion of a number of approaches under one heading."[26]

Because of this flexibility, in every chapter for all three paradigms he employs a *descriptive* rather than a *definitive* method. Thus we observe that at the beginning of his discussion on "exclusivism," instead of a definition, he starts with the two characteristics of the New Testament. Its overall reading on the one hand presents Christianity as the "absolute or final" faith and on the other, projects a "negative evaluation of other faiths."[27] He then provides us with the data suggesting Christian exclusivism, such as

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[24] Smith, W C, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991, 299.
[25] Race, A, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian theology of religions*, 2nd ed., London: SCM Press, 1993, 7.
[26] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 7, cf. 150.
[27] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 10.

John 14:6 "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" as understood by the Protestants and the "'Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus' (Outside the Church no salvation)" dogma of the Catholic Church.[28] Later Race comments that as a general character, exclusivism "counts the revelation in Jesus Christ as the sole criterion by which all religions, including Christianity, can be understood and evaluated."[29]

He is, however, more specific on "inclusivism." He remarks that it is

> "both an acceptance and a rejection of the other faiths, a dialectical 'yes' and 'no.' On the one hand it accepts the spiritual power and depth manifest in them, so that they can properly be called a locus of divine presence. On the other hand, it rejects them as not being sufficient for salvation apart from Christ, for Christ alone is saviour. To be inclusive is to believe that all non-Christian religious truth belongs ultimately to Christ and the way of discipleship which springs from him. Inclusivism therefore involves its adherents in the task of delineating lines between the Christian faith and the inner religious dynamism of the other faiths."[30]

The decisive role of Christ for salvation "as the final way of salvation" is essential for both exclusivism and inclusivism, but the latter recognises the "operation of the grace of God in all the great religions of the world working for salvation."[31] For inclusivism, Race notes, these are "equally binding convictions." While exclusivism creates a "confrontation" between the "religions" and the Christian faith, inclusivism aims to integrate "creatively" other religions into "Christian theological reflection."[32]

When we move to pluralism, again Race starts with description; only half-way through the chapter he provides us with a definition during his discussion of "relativism." Thus we discover that by pluralism, he means that

> "there is not one, but a number of spheres of saving contact between God and man. God's revealing and redeeming activity has elicited responses in a number of culturally conditioned ways throughout history. Each response is partial, incomplete, unique; but they are related to each other in that they represent different culturally focused perceptions of the one ultimate divine reality."[33]

Race is aware of the apparent danger with pluralism that it could create an "undifferentiated syncretism" which may render the "choice between traditions" as "arbitrary or meaningless:" i.e. "if all faiths are equally true, then all faiths are equally false."[34] To solve this dilemma, he examines the proposals of four Christian scholars: 1. Troeltsch's "ecumenical model of truth;" 2. Hick's "the Religion of the Concrete Spirit" (the Real-centred philosophy of religions); 3. Paul Tillich's "Christ as the principle of the process of creative transformation;" 4. W C Smith's "the personal faith of men and

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[28] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 10.
[29] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 11.
[30] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 38.
[31] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 38.
[32] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 38.
[33] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 77-78.
[34] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 78.

women." Race concludes that despite the problems each carry with it, all are confident that these can be overcome through a long process of "dialogue on many levels."[35]

Before beginning to apply three-fold typology in Muslim context, a few words are in order about its viability. Christian scholars have raised some questions about its appropriateness to analyse properly Christian attitudes towards other religions. Ian Markham, for instance, taking the lead from Hick's account, suggests that the categorisation conflates three points: "(1) the conditions for salvation, (2) whether the major world religions are all worshipping the same God, and (3) the truth about the human situation."[36] He further claims that while the theory focuses on the first, it is perplexed about the second, and in the third, connects "truth questions with soteriology."[37] He reckons that this commonly used threefold paradigm therefore distorts options and is unsatisfactory[38] for encompassing new approaches. To illustrate this, he develops an approach which he calls "Christian pluralism"[39] according to which he accepts "the pluralist soteriological account," yet affirms "the Christian narrative as true,"[40] and defines salvation as a "turn from self-centredness to other-centredness"[41] in the form of "self-giving love." He believes that "although the Christian metaphysics is true, it is treated in this context as secondary to the major truth of love."[42] Markham accuses Hick of "agnosticism," that is, his claim that "one cannot have better or worse metaphysical accounts" of the world.[43] Thus according to Hick's "religious ambiguity of the universe" principle, great world religions, though salvifically all effective, are no better or worse than each other.[44] Markham, however, agrees with the exclusivist theologian Leslie Newbigin, who claims that "traditions can grow, develop, and be 'more true' than other traditions."[45] In Newbigin's case Christianity is "more true" than other traditions. Markham concludes that the mind is capable of making sense of the world and therefore "we are able to formulate better or worse accounts of the world"[46] a claim from which pluralism proper demurs.

The formerly inclusivist Gavin D'Costa, however, replies to Markham's criticisms on the grounds that they are misleading. D'Costa contends that the three conflated points which Markham exposes in his paper are misinterpreted by him, because the text quoted from Hick on the three-fold paradigm primarily addresses the question of the possibility

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[35] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 104-105.
[36] Markham, I *"Creating Options: Shattering the 'Exclusivist, Inclusivist, and Pluralist' Paradigm,"* New Blackfriars, January 1993, 34.
[37] Markham, *"Creating Options,"* 34.
[38] Markham, *"Creating Options,"* 34.
[39] Markham, *"Creating Options,"* 39.
[40] Markham, *"Creating Options,"* 34.
[41] Markham, *"Creating Options,"* 36.
[42] Markham, *"Creating Options,"* 39. More controversially in the same page he contends that "some people might be nearer salvation if they were converted to atheism."
[43] Markham, *"Creating Options,"* 38.
[44] Hick defines great world religions as "vast complex religio-cultural totalities, each a bewildering mixture of varied goods and evils" (*ROF*, 14).
[45] Markham, *"Creating Options,"* 38.
[46] Markham, *"Creating Options,"* 38.

of salvation outside Christianity, which D'Costa thinks is a "strictly *a priori* theological question."[47] However, the question of whether "the major world religions are all worshipping the same God," Markham's second critical point, is partly related to "conditions for salvation" and partly depends on a "complex *a posteriori* examination of the historical particularities of the religion being examined."[48] D'Costa warns that, contrary to Markham's misleading accusations, many of those who use the typology are aware of the "different order of tasks."

D'Costa then turns to Markham's new option, "Christian pluralism", and claims that Markham, rather than transcending the three-fold paradigm,[49] actually "hovers between pluralism and inclusivism, not because he transcends these categories, but because there are certain unanswered questions"[50] in his thesis. Markham, firstly, does not answer whether "salvation is ultimately a matter of doing certain things" and secondly, does not clarify the relationship existing between "Christ, God and such acts of love and compassion within the 'non-Christian' world." If Markham maintains, D'Costa contends, that the charitable actions observed in the non-Christian religions are not related to "the God revealed in Christ," he will be a "pluralist" in Hick's sense. If, on the other hand, Markham believes that there exists such a connection, namely that these acts are considered implicitly "the work of Christ," he will be an inclusivist.[51]

Race also responds to critics of his typology ten years on in the second edition of his book. He identifies three main points of scrutiny. First, the complexity of the "history of global religious life" does not allow us to group Christian responses under three headings. Race responds that even though religions are different phenomenologically, there is a "family likeness between" them as "alternative *loci* of 'transcendent vision and human transformation."[52]

The second point concerns the diversity of responses to other religions and the incapacity of the typology to represent them properly. He states that the "types" are not "rigid categories" and they can sustain a "number of variations." To illustrate the point, Race shows how Karl Barth's position might be treated in different categories depending on his earlier or later writings, e.g. exclusivist or inclusivist.[53]

The third point is related to the inability of Race's typology to further the Christian understanding of other religions through "the *process* of encounter and dialogue between religious traditions."[54] To this challenge he replies that both the process of encounter and of dialogue "serve" "different purposes" and are "informed by different theologies" and "theological assumptions." He examines the case of John Cobb, the process theologian

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[47] D'Costa, G, *"Creating Confusion: A Response to Markham,"* New Blackfriars, January 1993, 42.
[48] D'Costa, *"Creating Confusion,"* 42.
[49] Markham, *"Creating Options,"* 34.
[50] D'Costa, *"Creating Confusion,"* 45.
[51] D'Costa, *"Creating Confusion,"* 45.
[52] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 150.
[53] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 150-151.
[54] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 151-152.

who "writes from a Christocentric perspective." Race shows that even though ambiguities exist because of Cobb's writing, it could be located within either inclusivism or pluralism, relying on different parameters.[55]

1.3.1. The Availability of a Pluralistic Option

Nevertheless, the logical consistency of Race's typology has been attacked recently from all corners and even lost one of its important allies: D'Costa. He recently engaged in a "conceptual spring cleaning exercise"[56] and changed his mind by committing what he described as an "act of public self-humiliation," believing that the threefold typology was no longer tenable.[57] He thinks that the typology as it is found in different versions is false, misleading and incoherent, because it does not really focus on the important questions at stake. D'Costa argues that there can be no such thing as pluralism or inclusivism, since they all operate within the logic of exclusivism which best demonstrates the way in which the typologies work. Put simply, inclusivist and pluralist typologies must logically be some form of exclusivism. That is to say, "there are certain claims to truth and those other claims that do not conform to these initial claims, explicitly or implicitly, are false."[58] D'Costa purports that, one way or the other, there is always some exclusion in pluralism which is claimed to be the best and most autonomous in illustrating the diversity of religions. The reason for pluralism's collapse back into exclusivism is due to the fact that, like exclusivism, "tradition specific criteria for truth" are concomitant with all pluralists and eventually any position that does not correspond to these criteria is "excluded from counting as truth (in doctrine and in practice)."[59] He contends that:

> "the real differences between those called pluralists, inclusivists and exclusivists are not, for example, that salvation may be attained by one who is a Muslim in this life (on this they may all agree), or that certain forms of loving one's neighbour are to be valued (on this too they may all agree), but rather they disagree in what counts as normative truth and how it operates."[60]

For an exclusivist and an inclusivist, the normative truth is one's own tradition, whereas pluralists have their own ways of defining what a normative truth is. D'Costa takes issue particularly with pluralism, since it claims to be the best of all explanations, especially its claim of tolerance and respect to other religions. He writes that "there is no high ground in the pluralist position for in principle its logic is no different from the exclusivist position."[61] Those who fall outside the pluralistic truth criteria are excluded just as those who are excluded from an exclusivist truth criterion. Thus, the deceptive charm of

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[55] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 151-152.
[56] D'Costa, G, *"The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions,"* Religious Studies 32, 1996, 225.
[57] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 223.
[58] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 225.
[59] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 225-26.
[60] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 226.
[61] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 225.

pluralism, D'Costa warns, should not deceive us into thinking that it is a better choice than its counterparts. I believe D'Costa is right in his insistence that the choices Race's typology offers always involve exclusive truth criteria; even though, as we shall soon see, Hick strongly objects to this assertion. However, some other pluralists, such as Keith Ward, are aware of the exclusivist truth claim pluralism puts forward. Hence in advocating his "convergent pluralism," Ward confesses frankly:

> "most, and probably all, traditions will need to be revised to approximate more nearly to a fuller unitary truth which none of them yet fully encapsulates. Such a view will be exclusivist about truth; but add that no one tradition has a monopoly or a complete grasp of truth. The truth lies ahead and is always capable of fuller formulation."[62]

Throughout his paper, D'Costa concentrates on pluralism and gives several examples from Hick,[63] a philosophical pluralist, and Knitter, a pragmatic pluralist, in D'Costa's understanding,[64] to demonstrate his point.

To illustrate in Hick's case, religions are true in as much as they direct believers to the Real by producing right changes in the believer and are false with regard to their claim to absolute truth. To support this conclusion, Hick uses the noumenal/phenomenal distinction of the Real (which I will examine extensively in the forthcoming chapters) and the distinction between "mythic" and "factual" truth, i.e. that the religious language does not apply to the noumenal Real and should be understood mythically. To find out Hick's truth criteria, D'Costa presses his usual two charges. The first is that "Hick's truth criteria are finally theistic, grounded in a philosophical cum cross revelatory conception of an all loving God who desires the salvation of all men and women and who creates the world so that this scenario is achieved, with the final result of eternal loving fellowship."[65] He points out that this was the theistic line Hick argued for in his earlier thesis (e.g. in *God and the Universe of Faiths*[66]) and can even be traced in his mature pluralism (e.g. in parts of *An Interpretation of Religion*[67]). By refusing the first claim, Hick faces the second

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[62] Knight, C, *"Psychology, Revelation and Interfaith Dialogue,"* International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion 40, 1996, 152 (cited from Ward, K, *A Vision to Pursue*, London: SCM Press, 1991, 175).

[63] Projecting implicit or explicit exclusivist tendencies is a charge often made against Hick by others as well. See for example, Surin, K, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech': "Religious Pluralism" in the Age of the McDonald's Hamburger,"* Modern Theology 7:1, 1990, 67-101; Apczynski, J V, *"John Hick's Theocentrism: Revolutionary or Implicitly Exclusivist?,"* Modern Theology, 8:1, 1992, 39-52.

[64] D'Costa's labelling of Hick's theory as "philosophical" and Knitter's as "practical or pragmatic pluralism" seems to me inadequate. As we shall see in the discussion of Hick's pluralism, his soteriological criterion of "human transformation as salvation/liberation" is very pragmatic indeed in its handling of religions and religious truths for which he is usually criticised. Thus I would call Hick's theory a *philosophical-pragmatic pluralism*. As to Knitter, he combines pluralism with liberation theology, thus I describe his position as *liberational pluralism*. Hick makes similar remarks to Knitter's position without naming it. See Hick, J, *"The Possibility of Religious Pluralism: A Reply to Gavin D'Costa,"* Religious Studies 33, 1997, 163.

[65] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 228.

[66] London: Macmillan, 1973.

[67] London: Macmillan, 1989. In his reply to D'Costa, Hick rejects strongly this accusation and challenges D'Costa to show which parts carry "incipient" theistic features (Hick, *"The Possibility,"* 163-164). So far, no reply yet.

charge, which is "transcendental agnosticism," that is "one cannot know what truth is, except that there is a truth that is beyond us."[68] Hick's distinction between "the noumenal and the phenomenal," D'Costa believes, forces him to declare that none of the images of the "noumenal is privileged."[69] The way out for Hick, D'Costa suggests, can be one of three choices. First, the Real "contains contradictions for contradictory things may be said of it," with which Hick disagrees since the Real cannot "be contradictory." Secondly, "the statements can be reconciled in a higher propositional synthesis which is able to render the partial truth of both statements in such a way that their contradictory nature is overcome."[70] This reconciliatory conclusion, D'Costa continues, results in such a statement that "has more appropriateness and validity about the Real than the previous two"[71] statements that Hick began with. If this is correct, then we have truth criteria that privilege "some phenomenal images as compared to others,"[72] which refers to D'Costa's earlier charge of theistic leanings even in Hick's mature philosophy. To avoid this, I believe, Hick supports the strong ineffability of the Real (that we do not even know whether it is good or bad, one or many; these conceptions just do not apply to it). Finally, we come to third solution, which is D'Costa's main charge: "transcendental agnosticism." It could be that "the two initial statements have no cognitive purchase at all but are only useful in creating attitudes and dispositions which lead to salvation."[73] As far as "ontological claims" are concerned, this "leads to transcendental agnosticism" which has "very specific truth claims that are also exclusive truth claims."[74] He concludes that the pluralists just "skewed" the question from the focal point of revelation itself, its availability to us and its relation to other truth-claims encountered in the world, to the question of "*how many are saved.*"[75] He believes that pluralism cannot even answer that question, as "one can find universalists in all three camps."[76]

Hick, as an eminent exponent of the typology, describes D'Costa's efforts as those which "obscure clear and useful distinctions by confused and confusing ones." By way of "some further spring cleaning," he asserts that D'Costa commits a logical error in claiming that to "use a criterion is to be an exclusivist," in the sense of "accepting something and rejecting something else."[77] Exclusivism and pluralism are so different from each other that "even if we banished the word 'pluralism' the two rival views would remain so manifestly different that we would still need different names for them."[78] Hick

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[68] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 228.
[69] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 228.
[70] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 229.
[71] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 229.
[72] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 229.
[73] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 229.
[74] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 229.
[75] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 232, my italics.
[76] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 232. The natural conclusion which one can derive from D'Costa's confession is that, contrary to his previous advocacy of inclusivism, he must be an exclusivist now since there is no such thing as inclusivism. In his swift reply to D'Costa, Hick draws our attention to this change (Hick, *"The Possibility,"* 161, fn. 1).
[77] Hick, *"The Possibility,"* 161.
[78] Hick, *"The Possibility,"* 161.

contends that to use the word "exclusivism," in this "purely notional and trivial sense" is, although "intelligible," "much more misleading than helpful." Thus following D'Costa's logic of exclusivism, one becomes an "exclusivist when one admires Mahatma Gandhi and the Dalai Lama but condemns Hitler and Stalin."[79] To express the arbitrariness of D'Costa's position, Hick writes:

> "For to make an assertion about anything is to deny its contrary, and to propose a theory or view about anything is to reject alternative views. But to label all judgments, all proposing of theories and hypotheses, all expressions of opinion, as exclusive would be to empty the term of any useful meaning. For there could then be no non-exclusivist statements, so that the term would cease to mark any distinction."[80]

Hick's supposition is that certainly D'Costa does not mean to "affirm the self-destructive principle that to use criteria is to be an exclusivist" in the widest possible sense of the word. Thus, he moves to the particular issue of religious studies where he stresses that his "main criterion is whether a movement is a context of human transformation from natural self-centredness to a new orientation centred in the Transcendent, this salvific transformation being expressed in an inner peace and joy and in compassionate love for others."[81] As the source of this criterion, Hick shows the Golden Rule, which is common to all great world religions, as the provider of a "basic moral insight."[82]

Hick also dismisses D'Costa's logical point that exclusivism and pluralism share the same logical structure. He believes that "religious exclusivism and religious pluralism are of different logical kinds, the one being a self-committing affirmation of faith and the other a philosophical hypothesis."[83] He further reaffirms that "pluralism" is a "meta-theory about the relation between the historical religions" but "not another historical religion making an exclusive religious claim." Furthermore, it is a "second-order philosophical theory or hypothesis" not a "first-order religious creed or gospel."[84] But Hick does not seem to be addressing the point here. D'Costa's argument is not about the epistemic status of exclusivism and pluralism, it is about the way they operate logically, i.e. that they use the same logical structure of affirming something and rejecting another according to the truth criteria they are based on. It is difficult to understand why Hick does not want to concede the fact cited above from Ward: that "pluralism makes exclusive truth claims." Towards the end of his essay, Hick comes close to acknowledging this when he finally deals with the usual charge that the pluralist interpretation of religion contradicts self-understanding of a faith as "having the only fully authentic revelation or enlightenment." He points out that D'Costa also "contradicts the self-understanding of every religion except his own." But this is D'Costa's point (that their logical structure is the same). Hick eventually concedes that while there is close

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[79] Hick, *"The Possibility,"* 162.
[80] Hick, *"The Possibility,"* 162.
[81] Hick, *"The Possibility,"* 162.
[82] Hick, *"The Possibility,"* 164.
[83] Hick, *"The Possibility,"* 163.
[84] Hick, *"The Possibility,"* 163.

similarity in their logical structure, "there is still an important difference in their religious outlooks and practical outworkings."[85]

Another serious critique of pluralism is offered by Alvin Plantinga, who is primarily concerned with the epistemic issues related to the discussion. In response to some charges of the pluralists, he argues thoroughly and elaborately that to be an exclusivist is neither "arbitrary," nor "irrational," nor "unjustified," nor "unwarranted," nor "oppressive and imperialistic."[86] Just as D'Costa does, Plantinga also shows that the logic of pluralism is not very different from that of exclusivism. I can understand, respect and share most of Plantinga's arguments at the personal level. However, I have reservations about what he says on the "accident of birth" and its relation to one's beliefs. He cites Hick:

> "For it is evident that in some ninety-nine per cent of cases the religion which an individual professes and to which he or she adheres depends upon the accidents of birth. Someone born to Buddhist parents in Thailand is very likely to be a Buddhist, someone born to Muslim parents in Saudi Arabia to be a Muslim, someone born to Christian parents in Mexico to be a Christian and so on."[87]

Plantinga's inference from this "sociological fact" is that if he had been born, say, in Madagascar rather than Michigan, his "beliefs would have been quite different (e.g. he "probably wouldn't believe" that he was "born in Michigan"). "But of course," he continues "the same goes for the pluralist. Pluralism isn't and hasn't been widely popular in the world at large; if the pluralist had been born in Madagascar, or medieval France, he probably wouldn't have been a pluralist."[88] The crux of Plantinga's argument is that (1) the "hermeneutic of suspicion" that Hick promotes[89] is applicable to his own pluralistic arguments (i.e. that they are culturally and historically particular beliefs and in return vulnerable to a self-referentially corrosive effect). Furthermore, (2) being attached by birth to a place has no effect either on the epistemic value of our beliefs (i.e. it will not make them true or false) or on their reliability (whether they have warrant or not). Hick admits that "the relativity of religious belief to the circumstances of birth does not, of course show that claims to a monopoly of religious truth are unjustified."[90] But he still maintains that it warns us "to look critically at such claims."[91] Regarding Plantinga's first

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[85] Hick, *"The Possibility,"* 165.
[86] Plantinga, A, *"Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism,"* in The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith: Essays in Honor of William P Alston, ed. T D Senor, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995, 192.
[87] *AIR*, 2.
[88] Plantinga, *"Pluralism,"* 211-212. On another occasion, he writes "if Hick had been born elsewhere and elsewhen, he probably wouldn't have been a pluralist, so that by his own principle, he should think twice (or more) about his pluralism" (Plantinga, A, *"Ad Hick,"* Faith and Philosophy 14, no. 3, 1997, 298).
[89] Hick believes that as a result of the relativity of religious allegiance to the "accident of birth," a "hermeneutic of suspicion is appropriate in relation to beliefs that have been instilled into one by the surrounding religious culture." Hick, J, *"The Epistemological Challenge of Religious Pluralism,"* Faith and Philosophy 14, no. 3, 1997, 281.
[90] Hick, *"The Epistemological Challenge,"* 281.
[91] Hick, *"The Epistemological Challenge,"* 281.

point, Hick contends that "one is not usually a religious pluralist as a result of having been raised from childhood to be one, as (in most cases) one is raised from childhood to be a Christian or a Muslim or a Hindu, etc."[92] Therefore, he concludes, "the cases are so different that the analogy fails."[93]

Certainly several conclusions can be drawn from a sociological fact. It is obvious that in his critique of Hick's "hermeneutic of suspicion," Plantinga's singular aim is to provide epistemic justification for exclusivism, i.e. that it is neither "arbitrary" nor "arrogant," contrary to the pluralists' claim. He is not concerned with the soteriological implications of this position, which is my primary concern in this dissertation. Plantinga, nonetheless, airs my main problem with the relativity of religious belief to the circumstance of birth while addressing the effect of the awareness of religious diversity on a believer. He points out that it "serves as a *defeater*" for religious convictions- "an *undercutting* defeater, as opposed to a rebutting defeater," by directly reducing the "level of confidence or degree of belief in the proposition in question."[94] Despite my upbringing as a Muslim with the conviction that Islam is the final way of salvation for all human beings and Allah's mercy embraces everything, I see the fact that many are left out of salvation due to geographical coincidences. Taken to an Islamic context, neither D'Costa's nor Plantinga's responses to pluralism answer my existential dilemma[95] that "if the way to salvation is exclusively held by one tradition, how an all-loving and compassionate God allows so many to remain outside of this path. Does not this effectively mean ascribing salvation to geographical luck, which we have no hand in?" D'Costa hinted earlier that all three camps in Christianity may agree that a Muslim in this life might ultimately be saved. In fact he said pluralism in this regard is no better than exclusivism and inclusivism, since both camps include universalists. At the academic and personal levels this may seem to be a sound way out; but when taken to communal level it will be problematic, since the universalism of the universalists is not always understood and accepted by the absolutists. This brings us to Hick's point about Plantinga's understanding of exclusivism.

In his reply to Plantinga's defence of religious exclusivism, Hick seizes the opportunity to point out that his understanding of exclusivism[96] is so narrow that:

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[92] Hick, *"The Epistemological Challenge,"* 281.
[93] Hick, *"The Epistemological Challenge,"* 281.
[94] Plantinga, *"Pluralism,"* 214.
[95] I am aware that neither is probably concerned with the soteriological implications of exclusivism at this stage; but my point is that when soteriology is brought into the discussion, the "undercutting defeater" effect that Plantinga points out becomes ever stronger. This is the existential dilemma that I have in mind.
[96] Regarding his understanding of exclusivism, Plantinga writes:

> "I shall use the term 'exclusivism' in such a way that you don't count as an exclusivist unless you are rather fully aware of other faiths, have had their existence and their claims called to your attention with some force and perhaps fairly frequently, and have to some degree reflected on the problem of pluralism, asking yourself such questions as whether it is or could be really true that the Lord has revealed himself and his programs to us Christians, say, in a way in which he hasn't revealed himself to those of other faiths" (Plantinga, *"Pluralism,"* 195).

> "only people who are 'rather fully aware of other religions' and aware also 'that there is much that at least looks like genuine piety and devoutness' within them are to be counted as exclusivists. He thus ignores by stipulative definition the aspect of the Church's stance through the centuries that has been expressed in the persecution and murder of Jews, in violent crusades against Muslims, in the validation of European imperialism, and the ignorant denigration of other religions."[97]

One is of course entitled to have one's beliefs, such as Plantinga, who is a "knowledgeable, thoughtful and ethically sensitive Christian exclusivist."[98] However, loaded with exclusivistic truth claims, when we move to the social level, then we face the difficult dilemma of religious wars, intolerances, discriminations, etc. that I point out in my introduction. That is to say, the *ultimate* hope of salvation offered by exclusivist or inclusivist universalists for a non-Christian will not be of much use in resolving the day-to-day problems caused particularly by religious differences.[99] As recent as a month ago, a newspaper article bears witness to this predicament. According to the article, the Southern Baptist Church, "the largest Protestant denomination" in the U S, launched a simultaneous campaign in its 40,000 congregations to "convert Jews to Christianity during the Jewish new year holiday" (*Rosh Hashanah*). Apparently, the Southern Baptist Church has similar programmes to convert Muslims (during Ramadhan, the holiest month), Hindus, and Buddhists. The U S Jewish leaders responded furiously by saying that they would like "a little less love and a little more respect" and described the attempts as "being wrong headed, arrogant or even contributing to the spiritual and cultural equivalent of the Holocaust." Their reaction becomes particularly more meaningful, given that the campaign came after a "number of attacks on Jewish sites" in the U S.[100]

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[97] Hick, *"The Epistemological Challenge,"* 280.
[98] Hick, *"The Epistemological Challenge,"* 280.
[99] I am not certainly arguing that Plantinga is not concerned with the social aspect of exclusivism. But his primary concern here is the epistemic justification of exclusivism against the charges levelled by pluralists. In fact a broader reading of his comments (especially in *"Ad Hick,"* 298) might suggest that he would argue for an exclusivism which fosters tolerance and respect for other religions against a pluralism, such as Hick's, which ends up preaching agnosticism and an "air of scepticism" towards all religions. In other words a tolerant exclusivism might be a better option for a committed Christian than a skeptic pluralism. As we shall see later in chapter four, this is a fair criticism of Hick's hypothesis, which I will take on board seriously and opt for a moderate soteriological pluralism in chapter five which centres around the moderate ineffability of the Real and soteriological efficacy of religions. I argue that a moderate pluralism will serve as a better alternative to facilitate tolerance, respect, understanding, etc. between religions and societies than a tolerant exclusivism. Indeed, Muslims (for most of their history) and the Roman Catholic Church (since the Vatican II), to take two examples, have been exercising some form of tolerant exclusivism but with little success in the way of either promoting positive attitudes towards other religions and religious communities or resolving many of the well-known religious conflicts. As I see it, the main problem with a tolerant exclusivism, even in its mildest form, is the expectancy or the belief that *others* are wrong and deluded and will be better off securing salvation/liberation if *they* believe in what *we* believe. Thus, I believe that unless we move towards an understanding that other religions are or might be as good ours soteriologically, we will see more of the similar instances of the Southern Baptist Church conversion campaigns, be it organised by Christians, Muslims or others, which worsen the fragile relations among religious communities, raise tensions and cause more problems.
[100] Borger, J, *"Jews Reject Baptist Love Offensive,"* The Guardian, 10 Sept. 1999.

D'Costa remarks about the "irony" of the tolerance of pluralism that "it is eventually intolerant towards most forms of orthodox religious belief, Christian or otherwise."[101] I cannot see clearly what he means by being 'intolerant', but I will try to elaborate it in some more detail. (1) If he means that "pluralism is not and will not be tolerant towards orthodox ways of living a religion," I dispute this since Hick always denies that pluralism ever advocates a single universal world religion. (2) If he means that "pluralism does not induce tolerance towards other ways of living," I disagree with this, too. I believe, compared to exclusivism and inclusivism, pluralism induces more positive and peaceful behaviour among communities. (3) If he means that "pluralism claims that exclusivist and inclusivist practitioners' of a religion will not attain salvation/liberation," he is probably mistaken, for I believe that pluralism does not make such a claim. (4) If, however, he means that it does not respect the self-understanding of a religious belief, I think he is right -as I just pointed out earlier, Hick concedes this as well. Where does *the plurality of pluralism* lie then and what are the costs and benefits involved in it?

Pointing decisively to the relation between "revelation, truth and salvation" in Christian theology of religions, D'Costa accused pluralists, such as Hick and Knitter, of "skewing" the question to "*how many are saved*."[102] But to me "how many are saved" is as important as revelation and truth. I believe this is the case with the Southern Baptist Church's conversion campaign, since, as devout Christians, they worry about those who have not received the message of Jesus Christ. I agree with D'Costa that this does not mean that we should automatically adopt a sceptical view of revelation and truth. But I do not think the Southern Baptist campaign is helpful either. Despite Plantinga's grim picture about the negative effects of religious diversity on believers (that it works as an "undercutting defeater"), his final answer to the problem is a positive one, as far as an exclusivist is concerned. He suggests that "a fresh or heightened awareness of the facts of religious pluralism could bring about a reappraisal of one's religious life, a reawakening, a new or renewed and deepened grasp and apprehension"[103] of one's religious beliefs. In a way Hick and Plantinga agree that the awareness of religious pluralism will make one reassess one's belief, but the end results are opposite of each other: While Hick widens the scope of salvation/liberation to other religions and limits Jesus' role as the only saviour to Christians, for Plantinga it means a reawakening and reaffirming of one's exclusivistic truth claims.[104] As I just stated, maybe my faith is not very strong or maybe I am too short-sighted, but Plantinga's positive "reawakening" of one's religious beliefs

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[101] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 229.
[102] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 232, my italics.
[103] Plantinga, *"Pluralism,"* 215.
[104] In his article, Plantinga puts forward two Christian truth claims by way of exemplifying the issue and builds his argument primarily on these. They are:

> (1) "the world was created by God, an almighty, all-knowing and perfectly good personal being (one that holds beliefs, has aims, plans and intentions, and can act to accomplish these aims) and (2) [h]uman beings require salvation, and God has provided a unique way of salvation through the incarnation, life, sacrificial death and resurrection of his divine son" (*"Pluralism,"* 192).

through the encounter of the reality of religious diversity does not seem to work for me. As a Muslim, the question of "how many are saved," or rather "how many are not saved," is still an enormous task waiting to be resolved.[105]

One of the most important contributions to the discussion of D'Costa's article was his call for a "*criteriological typology* to analyse different approaches to religious pluralism" as a "more adequate and helpful typology" which will "isolate the questions of revelation and truth as the most fundamental from a Christian point of view."[106] Neither Hick picked up on the issue in his response to D'Costa, nor, to my knowledge, D'Costa wrote anything about it yet. I believe that a criteriological typology is the key issue in developing a pluralistic hypothesis. Certainly developing such a typology goes beyond the scope of this project. But, in order to clarify my position, I will look briefly at some of the possible problems and solutions, since a "soteriological pluralism" will be my main concern in this thesis. Hick did not respond to D'Costa's charge that, in Hick's mature theology, religious doctrines -truth claims- "have no cognitive purchase at all but are only useful in creating attitudes and dispositions which lead to salvation."[107] In fact, as will be seen later, Hick calls them "'secondary' packaging and labelling."[108] So, he argues obviously for a *"soteriological pluralism."* Now if we were to develop a criteriological typology and examine the widely used three stances -exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism- from this aspect we would have a different picture. If we examine them from the *normative truth criteria* they use, as D'Costa has shown, we will realise that their logical structure is quite similar; in other words they all make exclusive truth claims with excluding results.[109] But when we look at the *soteriological criteria* that they employ, we will see a different picture, which is very close to the common perception of Race's typology. Exclusivism restricts salvation to one tradition, inclusivism primarily reserves it to one's own while accepting others as possible means as well, whereas pluralism views all religions as equally valid ways of achieving salvation/liberation.

To sum up, I suppose one can say that there can be no epistemically non-exclusivist ways of establishing a pluralistic theory, if by exclusivism we mean accepting some and rejecting other truth claims. That is to say, an interpretation of religion -be it naturalistic or religious- will always involve truth criteria that accept some truth claims while rejecting others. In this respect, pluralism is no different from other hypotheses. However, I believe one can have a different evaluation of religions by focusing on the soteriological

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[105] I am not suggesting, of course, that it is not a "vital question" for Plantinga. He might indeed hold a universalist view about the salvation of non-Christians, but as far as I can see he chooses not to address the issue in his defence of exclusivism. Thus I cannot conclusively say what he thinks about the salvation of non-Christians.
[106] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 226.
[107] D'Costa, *"The Impossibility,"* 229.
[108] *PRP*, 46.
[109] Christopher Partridge rightly states that as far as its epistemological status is concerned, "Hick's 'Real-centric' philosophy of religion[s] is fundamentally another competing religious worldview with distinct ideas concerning the nature of ultimate reality, human existence and salvation" (Partridge, C, *H. H. Farmer's Theological Interpretation of Religion: Towards a Personalist Theology of Religions*, Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1998, 336).

criteria that a theory employs. Although my intention is not to restore or revive Race's typology, I suggest that it might still serve as a useful tool in understanding Muslim attitudes towards other religions. Therefore, despite all its deficiencies, and not because I agree with or seek to further it as such, but for the sake of clarity and of sticking to the structure of Hick's own arguments, I will now analyse and examine the Islamic attitudes to other religions within the boundary of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, respectively.

I should also note that, at this stage, my examination will be limited only to Muslim attitudes to other religions without extending it to Christian attitudes, especially to well known names such as Kraemer (exclusivist), Rahner (inclusivist) and Troeltsch (pluralist), despite the fact that I use a typology developed for Christian attitudes. My reasons for this restriction are several. First, even if it is brief, I will examine Christian attitudes towards the end of chapter two through Hick's responses to them. Secondly, more extensive work on Christian responses can be found in works specifically devoted to this issue, i.e. it is well studied by Christian scholars.[110] Thirdly, as I made clear at the outset of my work, my concern in this project is Hick's pluralistic theory and Islam, not Christian attitudes to other religions in general. My final and more crucial aim in this section will be to test both Race and Hick's claim that the typology can be successfully applied to other religions as well as Christianity. As a first attempt by a Muslim, we shall see how far this claim can be verified within an Islamic context.

Before beginning to study solutions offered within the framework of this three-fold typology, methodologically speaking, it certainly ought to be acknowledged that there are exclusivisms, inclusivisms and pluralisms rather than exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism as a general understanding of other religions from both Christian and Islamic perspectives. Thus, though not frequently used, whenever the words exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism and their derivatives appear in the following paragraphs, they are, generally speaking, meant to refer to some particular version of the paradigm represented by the specific scholar in question.

1.3.2. Exclusivism: A Muslim Approach

Exclusivism maintains that only one religion holds the absolute truth that leads to salvation, while others are considered to be in error in varying degrees and unfit as vehicles of salvation, despite the traces of truth they may contain. The exclusivist line finds its roots among Muslims from the belief that Islam is the final and full religion for humanity as put forward in the Qur'an as a way of life. This belief is expressed vividly, according to many orthodox Muslim scholars, in verses like these:

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[110] See for instance: Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism* and D'Costa, G, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions*, Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell: 1986; Knitter, P, *No Other Name? A Critical Study of Christian Attitudes Towards the World Religions*, London: SCM Press, 1985.

"Whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted from him and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers."[111]

"The [true] religion in the sight of Allah is Islam."[112]

"Today, I have perfected your religion for you, completed my grace on you and approved Islam as a religion for you [all humankind]."[113]

Just as Christianity was aware of Judaism from its start, so Islam was aware of Judaism and Christianity, a fact which resulted in Islam's recognition of the earlier divine books and the prophets and in the introduction of the notion of "the religion of Abraham"[114] as well as "ahl al-Kitab" (people of the Book). Every Muslim has to believe in the continuity of revelation and of prophecy throughout history, but this did not mean Muslims accepting other religions as they are. In fact, in explaining why a new religion in the form of Islam was needed, Muslims usually appeal to the verses critical of the Jews and of Christians. The Jews were accused of "altering the scripture"[115] and the doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation were the biggest fault of Christianity.[116] Thus the traditional Muslims believe that as far as they were aware, other religions were corrupt and there was a genuine need for a new universal religion. This was Islam, revealed in the Qur'an, as explained and lived by Muhammad and his closest companions. On the one hand, Muhammad was no different from other prophets in explaining the religion of Abraham,[117] but on the other hand everybody is expected to follow him since, as the last prophet, he was calling for the true religion of Abraham: *Islam*, which effectively abrogated and invalidated all religions before it.[118]

This was and still is the general assumption prevalent among many Muslim communities and scholars. I shall now try to exemplify it by focusing on the views of the classical Islamic scholar *Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi*[119] (d. 333/944)[120] This is important for two reasons: one is that even though al-Maturidi wrote more than a thousand years ago during Islam's glory days, his exclusivist views continue to find wide acceptance among Muslim communities, perhaps as high as ninety five percent. The other is that we can find many contemporary scholars who express more or less the same, or

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[111] *The Qur'an* 3:85.
[112] *The Qur'an* 3:19.
[113] *The Qur'an* 5:3.
[114] *The Qur'an* 2: 130, 135; 3:95; 4:125; 6:161; 12:38; 19:123; 22:78
[115] *The Qur'an* 4:46f.; 2:75; 5:13, 41.
[116] *The Qur'an* 5: 72, 73; 4:171.
[117] *The Qur'an*, 2:285.
[118] This is the dividing line between exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist advocates in Islam. Even though they all share the basic conviction of the "continuity of revelation," they differ in their interpretation of it. Exclusivists claim that Islam invalidates all previous religions, whereas inclusivists say it does not do so but it is the best fitting Abrahamic religion for humanity's needs; while pluralists share inclusivists understanding of abrogation, they claim Islam is one way among many. This is a very tentative generalisation though, to which we shall return later.
[119] His full name is Abu Mansur Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Mahmud al-Samarkandi al-Maturidi.
[120] I will provide the Islamic dates as well as the conventional, respectively when a classical Islamic scholar is at issue.

more extreme views. Any book or article on Islamic theology will easily demonstrate this.[121]

Al-Maturidi was considered to be the founder of the "doctrinal school" *Maturdiyya*, "one of the two orthodox Sunni schools of *kalam*"[122] (Islamic theology), which is still alive and followed by millions throughout the Muslim world. His most important book on *kalam* is *Kitab al-Tawhid*[123] (literally meaning "the Book of Unity"). My reason for choosing al-Maturidi as an example for exclusivism is a recent book on his theology by Hanifi Özcan.[124] Özcan's title, *Religious Pluralism in al-Maturidi*, gives the impression that al-Maturidi was some form a pluralist, at least this was what I thought when I first saw the book. However, in the introduction it becomes apparent that Özcan in fact puts al-Maturidi among *inclusivists*, since Özcan believes that pluralism cannot be achieved between theistic and non-theistic religions. Özcan's proposal is that we should try and achieve a form of pluralism, i.e. inclusivism, among the Abrahamic religions which are all based on revelation. To this extent, Özcan suggests, al-Maturidi gave us a good example of pluralism (i.e. inclusivism) between theistic Abrahamic religions.[125] We shall see in the following paragraphs how true this assertion is.

At this stage, I should perhaps make a point about Özcan's understanding of the three fold typology. Even though Özcan is aware of the works of pluralists like Hick, W Cantwell Smith and Paul Knitter, he seems to be mixing the two terms or using them in literal sense, without really making this clear, and not as understood by Race and others. I can only speculate that by the "pluralism of Abrahamic religions," he is probably arguing for a pluralism which recognises the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions as effective salvific ways. But neither Race, nor Hick, nor many other pluralists would accept this as pluralism, since it will end up either as "theistic exclusivism," or "theistic inclusivism," depending on the treatment of non-theistic religions totally or partially false. Even to maintain this understanding is very difficult, since Özcan establishes a direct link between pluralism and inclusivism: that is one requires the other and one cannot talk of either of them without mentioning the other[126]. As I see it, this certainly is not the case. It is like calling Hick a pluralist inclusivist or Rahner an inclusivist pluralist, which is not helpful at all. For the same reason, the book also should have been named "Religious Inclusivism in al-Maturidi," though as we shall see this is not an accurate description of al-Maturidi's thought either.

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[121] As an example I can cite Koçyigit, T, *"Cennet Müminlerin Tekelindedir"* (*Muslims Have Monopoly over Paradise*), Islami Arastirmalar Dergisi (Journal of Islamic Research) 3, no. 3, 1989, 85-94.
[122] Bosworth, C E et al., eds., *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, v. 6, Leiden: E J Brill, 1991, 846.
[123] al-Maturidi, E M M, *Kitab al-Tawhid*, ed. F Kholeif, Beirut: Dar al-Mashreq, 1970.
[124] *Matüridi'de Dini Çoğulculuk* (*Religious Pluralism in al-Maturidi*), Istanbul: IFAV, 1995. In the subsequent references, I refer to the book as *Maturidi* not al-Maturidi, since I refer to the Turkish copy, which uses the Turkish spelling without the Arabic definite article "al."
[125] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 23.
[126] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 23.

In examining al-Maturidi's thought about other religions, I centre my attention on three subjects. I will look, first, at his understanding of the concept of religion under which he distinguishes between *religion* as the generic faith in God,[127] i.e. *islam*, and the institutionalised religions, *shari'a*, e.g. Islam. Secondly, the Qur'an's relation to other scriptures and the problem of abrogation, *naskh*, will be studied. Thirdly, the special case of (*ahl al-kitab*) the people of the Book, the Qur'anic phrase which was used by al-Maturidi to refer to Jews and Christians,[128] will be considered.

According to al-Maturidi, true religion is based on the witness and the testimony of the prophets[129] and never changes, which he names *din al-tawhid*, the religion of unity. The basic requirement in this religion of unity, which is also called *islam*, as distinct from the institutionalised Islam Muhammad preached, is "to believe in one God and worship none but him."[130] To this extent Muhammad did not bring anything new, he simply reiterated what previous prophets had taught before him.[131] Indeed, Islam places great importance on the continuity of revelation throughout history. Thus the Qur'an states:

> "We, indeed, sent among every people an apostle" (16:36).
>
> "There was never any people without a warner having lived among them" (35:24).[132]

Al-Maturidi places great importance on reason in his theology. As in our sensory knowledge, reason plays a crucial role in either deciding to accept the religion taught by the prophets[133] or, if one is not aware of any divine revelation, finding out about the existence of one God. Thus Islam is also called "*religio naturalis*" or "*Ur-Religion*"[134] leaning on an authentic *hadith*[135] by the Prophet Muhammad.[136] The hadith states that "Every child is born with an innate capacity to *submission to God*, i.e. islam; it is his/her *parents* that Christianise, Judaise or Magianise her/him, as an animal delivers a perfect baby animal. Do you find it mutilated?"[137] This is what Hick calls the factor of the "accident of birth" in choosing one's religion.[138]

Once this given instinct to believe is established, al-Maturidi goes on to distinguish between this basic type of religion, i.e. *faith* in one God, and the institutionalised religions taught by different prophets at the different periods of time, *shari'a*. He argues that faith always comes before religion[139] and while faith remains the same, religions

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[127] This is very close to Wilfred Cantwell Smith's understanding of faith. See his: *Faith and Belief: The Difference Between Them*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1998, esp. Chp. 3, 33-52.
[128] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 112.
[129] al-Maturidi, *Kitab al-Tawhid*, 8; Özcan, *Matüridi*, 46.
[130] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 47.
[131] See *the Qur'an* 10:71-72; 2:130-132; 12:101; 5:44; 3:52-53.
[132] Cf. other verses in *the Qur'an* 4:163-165; 6:130-131; 13:7; 23:44.
[133] al-Maturidi, *Kitab al-Tawhid*, 9.
[134] al-Faruqi, I R, *"Islam and Other Faiths,"* in The Challenge of Islam, ed. A Gaufar, London: Islamic Council of Europe, 1978, 93-96.
[135] A *hadith* is an authentic saying of the Prophet Muhammad as reported and recorded in reliable books and is second most important authority after the Qur'an.
[136] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 47-48.
[137] Reported by all authentic hadith collections. This one is in al-Bukhari, M b I, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Beirut: Dar al-Arabia, 1985, v. 2, hadith no. 467.
[138] *GHMN*, 44; *GUF*, 132; Cf. Özcan, *Matüridi*, 56, 93-94.
[139] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 56.

change as different prophets emerge in different environments which have their unique tribal, linguistic and cultural features.[140]

This distinction takes us to the core of al-Maturidi's thought, which is the second step in my analysis: the Qur'an's and Islam's relation to other religions as a *shari'a*, i.e. the issue of abrogation (*naskh*). Abrogation is both a very important and a contentious issue in Islam, which also marks the dividing line between exclusivists and inclusivists. The former believe that Islam abrogated all previous forms of religion, whereas the latter conditionally maintain the opposite view, as we shall see in detail in the forthcoming discussion of inclusivism. Therefore, it is no surprise that al-Maturidi holds that while the essence of religion, faith in the one unifying God, remains the same, a new religion, *shari'a,* abrogates the previous one.[141] In al-Maturidi's understanding abrogation means, Özcan suggests, the removal of the validity of a *shari'a,* which had a limited life time, and the replacement of it with a new one.[142] The implication of naskh is that one has to believe in and follow the new shari'a without hesitation,[143] if one wants to achieve salvation. However, a few paragraphs later, we learn from Özcan's exposition that, as al-Maturidi understands it, Allah's reason behind the principle of abrogation, which ostensibly produces several religions to choose from as we have today, is to test human beings to see if they will be able to choose the right, most up-to-date religion among many and in turn thereby to make them accountable for their choices.[144] The natural conclusion of this argument is that Islam is the final and full religion prescribed for all human beings[145] and everybody is expected to follow it. As far as I can see, far from being pluralistic or inclusivistic, this is plain Islamic orthodoxy and exclusivism as Race and Hick use it.

To be able to prove the superiority of Islam, al-Maturidi starts naively from Muhammad as a superior prophet over others. He attempts to do this, despite the clear Qur'anic statements attesting, first, to the recognition of the equality of the prophets[146] and consequently declaring that "Muhammad is but a messenger, messengers (the like of whom) have passed away before him."[147] It also runs against the common perception that it is not the personhood of Muhammad that matters but his message, as explained in the Qur'an and in the prophetic tradition, *sunna*.[148] Nevertheless, al-Maturidi tries to establish the superiority of Muhammad over the others by using circumstantial evidence

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[140] Despite the controversy about the sacred importance of Arabic for the Qur'an and Islam, al-Maturidi thinks that language is not that essential and even Arabic can be substituted with a different language during a worship (Özcan, *Matüridi*, 63).
[141] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 65.
[142] This is abrogation in the wider sense. Actually, looked at from the Qur'anic perspective, this wider sense of abrogation can not be authenticated. The generally known type of abrogation in the Qur'an is the abrogation within a religion; that is the removal of the validity of a law or a command with a different one (*The Qur'an* 2:106).
[143] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 66, 101.
[144] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 67.
[145] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 104.
[146] *The Qur'an*: 2:285.
[147] *The Qur'an* 3:144.
[148] Surprisingly, Özcan never draws attention to this important point.

such as the universality of his message,[149] the way his name is mentioned in the Qur'an[150] and more importantly the guarantee of continuity of his teachings till the end of this world, since he is the last prophet.[151] Muhammad's superiority in turn means the superiority of Islam and of its followers.[152] While he accuses *ahl al-kitab* of exclusivism, arrogance and ignorance in their denial of Islam,[153] he justifies Islam's superiority by relying on the process of the evolution of religions, with Islam at the peak.[154]

Now al-Maturidi has the criterion to judge other religions and beliefs. So far, he has demonstrated that, with its ever authentic holy scripture, the Qur'an, and Muhammad as the superior prophet over others, only Islam is the perfect religion for salvation, and as the followers of Islam, Muslims are also superior compared to the devotees of other religions.

By "other religions," al-Maturidi means three groups of people who rejected the message of Muhammad: (i) *ahl al-kitab* , the people of the book, whom he calls "the stubborn and arrogant people," (ii) the people of Mecca and (iii) "Sabiun" (Sabaeans),[155] with which we shall deal separately in examining inclusivism in Islam. Al-Maturidi divides *ahl al-kitab* into two groups. On the one hand, there were the followers of the true religion who recognised Muhammad as a prophet and accepted the Qur'an as an authentic holy scripture, but who nevertheless kept practising their religion. On the other hand, there were the stubborn infidels who refused to believe in Islam out of their arrogance and obstinacy.[156] As we shall soon see , this same artificial and problematic division exists in Muslim inclusivists as well. The apparent problem with this division is that historically speaking we do not have any knowledge or record of the first group, the good religious people of the book, in the eyes of al-Maturidi. We only know of converts to Islam who are called Muslim not *ahl al-kitab* after their conversion. Thus the naming does not apply to them and is therefore artificial. It is also problematic since, despite its pretension of good will towards *ahl al-kitab*, it does not address the real problem. We know that the majority of the people of the book did not and do not believe in either Muhammad's message or the Qur'an. In al-Maturidi's words, this rejection makes them unbelievers.[157]

Al-Maturidi focuses his criticism of *ahl al-kitab* on four points. The first and the second points are their failure to recognise Muhammad's prophethood and the Qur'an as the true revelation of God. He thinks that faith requires a whole acceptance of all the

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[149] *The Qur'an* 34:28.
[150] *The Qur'an* 33:40; 47:2 and 48:29.
[151] *The Qur'an* 33:40; Özcan, *Matüridi*, 104-106.
[152] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 105-106.
[153] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 96-97, 101-102.
[154] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 106-111.
[155] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 112.
[156] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 112.
[157] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 113.

revelation of God and of the prophets; one cannot accept some but refuse the rest.[158] In other words, "believing in one holy book sincerely necessitates believing in all the holy books and the prophets." He even generalises the point as to claim that "rejecting one prophet means rejecting all of them"[159] and rejecting a prophet and a holy book means rejecting "God."[160]

The third point is related to the oneness of God, i.e. *tawhid*. Al-Maturidi accuses *ahl al-kitab* of failing to secure this core belief of primordial religion with the association of a sonship to God of Uzair (Ezra) by the Jews and that of Jesus by the Christians.[161]

The final point is about their belief in the hereafter. Al-Maturidi acknowledges that *ahl al-kitab* have the belief in "resurrection and life after death," but he claims that *ahl al-kitab* do not believe in the judgement day, without which there can be no hereafter, since the components of the belief in the hereafter cannot be changed in any way.[162]

On all four counts, al-Maturidi contends that *ahl al-kitab* are deluded, in error and therefore unbelievers. Al-Maturidi's accusations towards *ahl al-kitab* are based on his conviction that all theistic religions share belief in the prophets and the books which puts one in an either-or position: this requires one either to believe everything or to believe nothing. Al-Maturidi believes that theistic religions reached their peak in Islam as the evolved religion of all, as explained in the Qur'an.[163] In conclusion, if one follows a religion, al-Maturidi asserts, it has to be none but Islam, because it is the only authentic and salvific/liberating religion humanity has at present. The rest are all in vain.

As has already become clear, this conclusion makes al-Maturidi a hard-line exclusivist. Özcan's efforts to present him as an inclusivist do not add up to a coherent thesis. Özcan also concedes that by the "religious unity of humanity" al-Maturidi means the Islamisation of the world population, for he believes that all other religions, including Judaism and Christianity, are deluded. Thus Özcan's interpretation of al-Maturidi's philosophy as a good and workable project of toleration between Abrahamic religions due to their common beliefs[164] is just as problematic as Hick's position which he criticises in his introduction and tries to replace. Özcan argues that Hick's proposal of the noumenal Real as the totally ineffable concept behind the phenomenon of religion is incoherent and leads to atheism. He also thinks that the incommensurability of experiences of God as personal and impersonal cannot be resolved. Thus, he concludes, we should instead try to reach a pluralistic understanding between theistic religions.[165]

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[158] This is a common line of thinking even among contemporary Muslims. Rahman, a modernist thinker, for instance, writes: "Prophethood, indeed, is an indivisible office; one cannot believe in some and not in others without 'giving the lie' to the very source of revelation" (*"Islam's Attitude toward Judaism,"* The Muslim World 72, no. 1, 1982, 3).
[159] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 115-116.
[160] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 115-116.
[161] *The Qur'an* 9:30; Özcan, *Matüridi*, 116.
[162] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 116-118.
[163] *The Qur'an* 5:3.
[164] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 122.
[165] Özcan, *Matüridi*, 12-17.

As far as I can see, al-Maturidi's treatment of other religions contradicts the spirit of Islam. There are two important predicaments which al-Maturidi's theology does not answer. The first is that it neither addresses nor tries to solve the obvious declaration in the Qur'an according to which the plurality of the religions is desired and planned by God as the norm for humankind.[166] To this we will come back later when we discuss the problems of pluralism in an Islamic milieu in our final chapter.

The second point is probably an illustration of the first: the case of the *Sabiun* (Sabaeans).[167] The Qur'an declares in two clear verses (2:62 and 5:69, which I shall examine in detail in the final chapter) the possibility of attaining salvation for Sabaeans on certain conditions. Özcan, however, quotes al-Maturidi as holding the view that they are totally in the dark and do not possess any hope of salvation.[168] Al-Maturidi does not discuss *Sabaeans* separately, since he is more concerned about *ahl al-kitab*. In my opinion, it is very difficult to justify al-Maturidi's allocation of Sabaeans among the people in dark, contrary to the verses' clear meaning. In fact these are the only two places where Sabaeans are discussed in the whole of the Qur'an where there is clearly hope of their salvation.[169] To use the ambiguity of Sabaeans as a religious group against their case is, I would argue, totally unjustifiable and means losing touch with the spirit of the Qur'an. This reflects the typical attitude of Muslim scholars in their treatment of Sabaeans in that they are either totally ignored or considered among the perverted.[170]

Özcan believes that al-Maturidi is more sympathetic towards *ahl al-kitab* since they are familiar with the core belief of monotheist religions, belief in one God, and are expected to become Muslims, for their distorted holy book and religion are abrogated by the Qur'an and Islam. Al-Maturidi, though, emphatically maintains that the Qur'an has nothing to do with either the Torah or the Bible as Jews and Christians possessed them in the time of Muhammad. What the Qur'an confirmed was the original content and the message of these holy texts before they were distorted and changed.[171]

It is clear from the above discussion that al-Maturidi is not an inclusivist despite Özcan's efforts to portray him as one. Al-Maturidi's aim of uniting monotheistic religions

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166 *The Qur'an* 49:13 also cf. 5:48.

167 As Jane D McAuliffe points out, Muslim exegetes cannot agree on the identity of the mysterious religious community *Sabi'un* (Sabaeans). Some hold that they are part of the people of the Book (p. 96, 101), others deny this, while others claim they are either "angel" or "sun" or "star-worshippers (p. 97-98). Some others believe that Sabaeans are those whom the message of a "prophet has not reached" (p. 100), i.e. they follow "an independent religion" (p. 101). This ambiguity, one may argue, led to a loose application of the term to those remain outside the Judeo-Christian-Islamic circle in the "easy, inexact fashion of those who despised such religions and thought of them unworthy of serious consideration" (p. 106) (See for more: McAuliffe, J D, *"Exegetical Identification of the Sabi'un,"* The Muslim World 72, no. 2, 1982, 95-106). In his translation of the Qur'an, A. Yusuf Ali also gives some valuable information in the light of latest archaeological research which links them to a religious group in Lower Iraq, near Basra, to a kingdom in the Yemen tract, and to the Queen of Sheba (*The Holy Qur'an: English translation of the meanings and Commentary*, trans. Ali, A Y, al-Madinah al-Munawarah: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, 1992, 27, fn. 76).

168 Özcan, *Matüridi*, 112, 116.

169 They are also mentioned in the Qur'an 22:17, but the context is slightly different.

170 McAuliffe, *"Exegetical Identification of the Sabi'un,"* 96-97, 106.

171 Özcan, *Matüridi*, 126.

under the roof of one unifying God initially sounds optimistic. However, seeing Islam as the only true representation of this one God and the Qur'an as the only true and authentic revelation puts him clearly in the exclusivist camp. It is obvious, in al-Maturidi's understanding, that as long as *ahl al-kitab* remain in their abrogated religion they will not be able to achieve salvation. The only way to salvation for them is to become Muslim and follow the lasting true message of Islam which contains the core of all revealed religions.[172]

Al-Maturidi does not discuss other theistic and non-theistic religions, Hinduism and Buddhism etc., which are not specifically mentioned in the Qur'an. However, from his treatment of *ahl al-kitab*, it is manifest that they, too, have to become Muslims in order to gain salvation.

Even though al-Maturidi appears to be justifying the religious situation of his time rather than trying to establish a thoroughly studied analysis of other religions, the line he took is almost unanimously accepted by today's Muslims. I will give only two examples. The first one is a reworked doctoral thesis entitled *The State of Being Astray and Guided in the Qur'an* by Ramazan Altıntaş.[173] In classifying the people who have gone astray according to the Qur'an, Altıntaş automatically places *ahl al-kitab* in this group next to the infidels (*al-mushrikun*) and the hypocrites (*al-munafiqun*).[174] He starts, by quoting al-Tabari (d. 310/923), with the assertion that *ahl al-kitab* have gone astray and therefore deserved the wrath of Allah.[175] To prove this premise, he then cites all the verses critical of *ahl al-kitab*. In the end, the reader is given a picture of the Jews and the Christians as the mob of people who not only have gone astray but also tried to take Muslims away from Islam.[176] Certainly for Altıntaş, the question of salvation for *ahl al-kitab* does not exist unless they repent and become Muslims.

My second contemporary example is a fervent article written as a protest to the inclusivistic arguments of Süleyman Ateş, to which I shall come shortly. It was written by Talat Koçyiğit and entitled "*Muslims Have Monopoly over Paradise*."[177] Koçyiğit proposes an argument almost identical to al-Maturidi's and Altıntaş's, which is that *ahl al-kitab* are in error and will not go to heaven unless they believe in Muhammad's message and follow it strictly. At one point, he stretches the limit to equate the obedience of Allah with obedience to Muhammad so that nobody can claim to obey Allah without obeying Muhammad and following Islam.[178] Koçyiğit proves to be a hard-line exclusivist, concluding with a verse to suggest that even the very thought of inclusivistic

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[172] al-Taberi, a classical Qur'an commentator, makes almost exactly the same comment with regard to the Sabaeans verse mentioned above (McAuliffe, *"Exegetical Identification of the Sabi'un,"* 96-97).
[173] Altıntaş, R, *Kur'an'da Hidayet ve Delalet*, Konya: REV Yayinlari, 1997. I owe great debt to my dear friend Dr Mahmut Yaşar for both bringing this book to my attention and providing me with it.
[174] Altıntaş, *The State*, 291.
[175] Altıntaş, *The State*, 299.
[176] Altıntaş, *The State*, 307.
[177] Koçyigit, T, *"Muslims Have Monopoly over Paradise,"* 85-94.
[178] Koçyiğit, *"Muslims Have Monopoly over Paradise,"* 91-92.

ideas means committing sin in the eyes of Allah. We shall come back to Koçyiğit's argument in the following section on inclusivism.

This negative line of thought has revealed itself in the history of Islam. As Wilfred C. Smith rightly remarks, the dependants of Islamic states were and are divided into two as *Muslim* and *ghayr Muslim* (non-Muslim).[179] Instead of upholding the Qur'anic classification of *Muslim*, *ahl al-kitab* and *ghayr Muslim*, the introduction of this dual classification affected grossly *ahl al-kitab* by portraying a negative and non-Qur'anic image of them.

Exclusivist approaches to the problem of religious plurality do inevitably seem to be aiming at preserving the superiority of one religion over others. Islam in this sense claims, in its own way, to be the unique way to salvation. However, as I stated in the outset in my introduction, Islamic exclusivistic arguments do not answer my existential dilemma, though they may be logical and comforting to an insider. Without going deep into the history of religions, if one considers the present distribution of the followers of religions, one is faced with a bleak religious picture of humanity. That is, if one follows the exclusivistic claims at least two thirds of the devout believers would not be able to attain salvation through no fault of their own, since religious adherence is ninety percent of the time related directly to one's birth place. Thus one is consigned to heaven or hell in exclusivistic arguments by matters of geographical accident. When, as a Muslim, I consider the Qur'anic "principle of the plurality," in religion as well as in other domains of life,[180] I immediately sense that this cannot be a solution desired by the merciful and compassionate Allah. This brings us to the softer approach to the problem of religious plurality: inclusivism.

1.3.3. Inclusivism: A Muslim Approach

Inclusivism holds that there is one surest way to salvation, which is Islam in Muslims' case, others may also lead to salvation but not as good as one's own, i.e. Islam. An inclusivistic approach could have been a common way of dealing with other religions from an Islamic perspective. Sociologically, Muslims set good examples of integration with other religions throughout history;[181] a good illustration of which was the Andalus Moorish Empire in Spain where Muslims, Christians and Jews produced a highly sophisticated, civilised and advanced society. However, as will be seen soon, theologically speaking, Muslims tended to remain exclusivist and claim to hold the absolute truth by developing the critical remarks of the Qur'an about the Jews and the Christians, supported with a firm belief in the oneness of God. Even the efforts of a mild-mannered inclusivist like Süleyman Ateş were confronted with fierce criticism. One

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[179] Smith, W C, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991, 299.
[180] I shall come back to this principle at the end of my thesis. For now though it is sufficient to say that according to the Qur'an plurality in every parts of life is "divinely organised and willed" (*The Qur'an* 5:47, cf. 11:118).
[181] Gibb, *Mohammedanism*, 3-5.

critic described his endeavour as "creating imaginary heavens for non-Muslims to enter." Thus theologically speaking even inclusivism was not considered an option for non-Muslims, as far as orthodox Islam was concerned. I will deal with the theological exclusivism of Muslims in detail in the last chapter. For now though we move on to consider a Muslim inclusivist approach.

Ateş is a renowned Qur'an scholar. Among other books, he is well known throughout the Islamic world for his modern exegesis of the Qur'an. Thus by training, he is an expert on the Qur'anic issues, a theologian one might call him, not a philosopher. Ateş therefore bases the bulk of his argument on the Qur'anic verses. He has written two articles on the subject;[182] the first contained his proposals and the second replied to criticisms, especially Koçyiğit's.

What are the signs that make Ateş an inclusivist as opposed to a pluralist even though he neither refers to nor seems to have any knowledge of inclusivism? There are two definite signs as far as I can see. The first is his limited understanding of *ahl al-kitab* which excludes the great majority of Christians (e.g. those who believe in the Trinity) and Jews. The second is that his strict adherence to a monotheistic notion of God prevents him even mentioning non-theistic religions such as certain forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, let alone discussing them. Indeed both attitudes are related to his acceptance of the absolute oneness of God, that is, not to worship any god except Allah, *tawhid.* In essence, he is arguing for a small minority who acknowledge Muhammad as a prophet and the Qur'an as an authentic revelation but remain in their religion without converting to Islam. By doing so, they are following the core of the prophets' message, viz. to worship none but Allah.[183] He on the one hand accepts that there is salvation outside Islam (differing from exclusivists), but on the other hand holds that one has to be a monotheist and acknowledge the message of Islam in order to gain salvation. Ateş holds that Islam is the surest way to salvation and judges other religions from an Islamic perspective (as opposed to pluralists). Thus his proposal becomes a "monotheistic inclusivism" revolving around explicitly the God of Abrahamic religions, but implicitly the God of Islam. To me this is a very limited inclusivism, even narrower than the renowned Catholic theologian Karl Rahner's, whose name has almost become synonymous with "anonymous Christianity" and inclusivism. Let us proceed then with Ateş's arguments to see if he can be considered a Muslim inclusivist.

Ateş starts with establishing the conditions of entering Paradise, namely attaining salvation, in the light of the Qur'anic message. They are only three: i) to believe in the absolute oneness of Allah (God), i.e. to worship none but Him, ii) to believe in the

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[182] Ateş, S, *"Cennet Kimsenin Tekelinde Değildir"* (*Nobody Has Monopoly over Paradise*), İslami Araştırmalar (Journal of Islamic Research) 3, no. 1, 1989 and *"Cennet Tekelcisi Mi?"* (*Can Anyone Monopolise Paradise?*), İslami Araştırmalar (Journal of Islamic Research) 4, no. 1, 1990.
[183] Ateş, *"Nobody Has Monopoly over Paradise,"* 14, 23-24.

Hereafter without a doubt, iii) to do good deeds.[184] To re-emphasise al-Maturidi's point, Ateş also sees the gist of all prophetic revelations in these three points as the broader meaning of *islam*. He believes that all the prophets were trying to bring the same message, and therefore all were in effect muslims and their religion was *islam*.[185] He quotes several Qur'anic verses to bolster this idea.[186]

Having established his three basic principles, Ateş deals with the controversial problem of *naskh*: Qur'an's abrogation of previous holy scriptures. He thinks that this narrow-minded and inauthentic idea has been "injected to the Qur'anic interpretations" as a "result of the efforts of monopolising Allah's mercy upon one nation."[187] He, then, places the Qur'an in its right location by reclaiming its position as the *confirmatory* of the previous revelations[188] not the abrogating.[189] He elaborates this thought by saying that the Qur'an confirms the Torah and the Gospels that were held by the people of the book when it was revealed, contrary to the traditionally held view, such as al-Maturidi's, that the confirmation relates to the original and authentic scriptures. This is one of the crucial points where Ateş departs from the Muslim exclusivists and he has been severely criticised for it. But he produces convincing Qur'anic verses clearly supporting his understanding[190] and verses asking *ahl al-kitab* to practice what is written in their scripture.[191] He also quotes Abdullah Draz's comparison between certain verses from Torah, Bible and the Qur'an, such as the ten commandments. Draz believes that all three confirm each other.[192] Finally, Ateş appeals to the Prophetic traditions (*sunnah*), as the second important source of knowledge in Islam, endorsing his viewpoint. It is unanimously accepted among the scholars of Islamic history that the Prophet has passed judgement according to Torah on the Jewish tribe of *Banu Qurayzah* in Madina when they broke the Charter of Madina by co-operating with the "hypocrites" (*Munafiqun*) and supporting the Meccans during the defensive *Battle of Handaq* (trench), fought against the Meccans.[193] The second example is related to the Najran Christians who visited

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[184] *The Qur'an* 2:62 and 5:69. Both verses are almost identical. The first reads: "Verily! Those who believe and those who are Jews and Christians, and Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and do righteous good deeds shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve." The second: "Surely, those who believe [in the Oneness of Allah, in his messenger Muhammad and all that was revealed to him from Allah], those who are the Jews and the Sabians, and the Christians, -whosoever believed in Allah and the Last Day, and worked righteousness, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve."

[185] Ateş, *"Nobody Has Monopoly over Paradise,"* 7.

[186] *The Qur'an*, 2: 285, 131-133, 136; 4:163.

[187] Ateş, *"Nobody Has Monopoly over Paradise,"* 9.

[188] *The Qur'an* 2:41; 5:48.

[189] As Mircea Eliade nicely puts it: According to Muslims, the Qur'an is the "'Newest Testament,' not contradicting, but corroborating and surpassing the Jewish and the Christian bibles. Yet in another way it more approximate the role of Jesus, the Logos, as the eternal and divine Word of the creator God; for Muhammad, while spotless and elect, is entirely human" (Eliade, M and I P Couliano, *The Eliade Guide to World Religions*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991, 147).

[190] *The Qur'an* 2:41; 3:93; 5:48.

[191] *The Qur'an* 5:43, 44-45, 47, 66-68.

[192] Ateş, *"Nobody Has Monopoly over Paradise,"* 18-20.

[193] Ateş, *"Nobody Has Monopoly over Paradise,"* 22. It happened in the 6 year of the Hijri, the Muslim calendar, (628 C E), and according to the judgement of the Torah (Deuteronomy 20:12), the "adult males" were executed and the rest was expelled (Rahman, F, *"Islam's Attitude toward*

Muhammad in Madina, where he let them worship according to their belief in the only mosque there was during their stay for one month.[194]

With regard to the changes made in the holy books by *ahl al-kitab*, Ateş expresses mixed opinions. Initially he limits these to the interpretations of the holy books and their commentaries basically in understanding, particularly on the Jewish part. He even says they were not alone in this sort of distortion, Muslims were also guilty of the same charge.[195] However, when he is pressed harder, he accepts that changes were made to the original scriptures in time but these happened after the revelation of the Qur'an finished. To prove this claim, he leans on the differences in the stories in Torah, the Gospels and the Qur'an. Naturally, as an inclusivist, he believes that the Qur'anic ones are correct, others have been distorted.[196] It is worth noting that he does not bother to deal with the crucial issues like Incarnation and Trinity in Christianity. This relates to the first principle of salvation, i.e. belief in the oneness of God. Ateş believes that the doctrines of Incarnation and Trinity violate this principle, and therefore, as I said in the opening lines, the great majority of Christians cannot achieve salvation whatever they do. Because Allah can forgive any sin except *shirk*, worshipping others than him.[197]

Ateş was attacked by several scholars as soon as his article appeared. Despite the fact that he was not calling for a Copernican Revolution in Muslim theology, as Hick had done almost a decade earlier,[198] the tone of the replies was quite stern. As I indicated earlier, I will focus on Koçyiğit's criticisms.

The discussion mostly concentrates on the scope of Muhammad's message, which includes abrogation, and Trinity and Incarnation. Koçyiğit maintains that believing in Muhammad's message brings with it the necessity to practice Islam in all aspects, whereas Ateş holds that the two faces of Muhammad's message are separable. That is, so long as one accepts Muhammad's message as true and is a good religionist in one's own religion, one will be saved, provided that one also meets the three basic criteria. Koçyiğit backs up his argument with the usual verses stating the need to obey the Prophet Muhammad and declaring Islam as the religion for all humankind.[199] He repeatedly says that one cannot obey Allah unless one obeys Muhammad and straightforwardly concludes

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Judaism," The Muslim World 72, no. 1, 1982, 6 and Farah, C E, *Islam: Beliefs and Observances*, New York: Barron's, 1994, 52).

[194] Ateş, *"Nobody Has Monopoly over Paradise,"* 22; Esack, F, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1997, 151; Hamidullah, *Introduction to Islam*, 176; al-Faruqi, *"Islam and Other Faiths,"* 102-103. Ateş makes a good point by rightly highlighting this point. However, it has to be pointed out that Muslim scholars, like him, usually quote this example when they talk about the Muslim toleration of other religions without really thinking about its full implications for Islam itself. I shall explore this point further in the final chapter when discussing pluralism and Islam in detail.

[195] Ateş, *"Nobody Has Monopoly over Paradise,"* 10-11; *"Can Anyone Monopolise Paradise?,"* 34-35.

[196] Ateş, *"Can Anyone Monopolise Paradise?,"* 34.

[197] *The Qur'an*, 4:116; Ateş, *"Can Anyone Monopolise Paradise?,"* 23.

[198] *GUF*, 125.

[199] *The Qur'an* 5:3; 3:31-32, 84-85; 24:54, 56; 4:80, 136.

that whoever does not obey Muhammad becomes a *kafir*, infidel, who deserves to go to Hell.[200] Relying on one verse in the whole Qur'an,[201] he even tries to justify this conclusion by claiming that "Allah promised to fill Hell in full but not Heaven."[202]

This surely is not an accurate picture of either the notion of Allah, or of Heaven and Hell or even Islam in general. Koçyiğit, probably out of zeal, does not even address the basic legal issues: that *ahl al-kitab* has been given a special status in Islamic legal system from (bilateral) marital rights to Muslims[203] to dietary laws and from civic duties to financial rights, etc. None of these rights have been granted to a *kafir*;[204] indeed, a *kafir* does not have the basic right to live in an Islamic state (though as we shall see in the last chapter, "who is a *kafir*", too, is open to discussion). As Mohammad Talbi puts it, the people of the Book are considered to be "inside" the community, while infidels are "outside."[205] Clearly then, Koçyiğit's picture is neither an sound representation of the theory nor a correct account of the centuries of historical Islamic practice.

Ateş's first answer to the accusations is a verse from the Qur'an (2:110-111) where the exclusivistic claims of the Jews and the Christians is negated:

> "They say: 'None will enter Paradise except those who are Jews and Christians.' Such are their vain wishes. Say [O Muhammad]: 'Bring forth your proof if you are truthful.' Indeed, those who submit themselves to Allah, while doing good, will have their reward with Allah. They will have nothing to fear and will not grieve."

He then produces verses which attest the vastness of the mercy of Allah and the reward for good deeds.[206] He reiterates his point that the verses clearly evince that the essence of religion does not consist of saying this and that but of doing good deeds. "Whoever believes in Allah and the Hereafter and does righteous deeds will enter Paradise."[207] In the mean time, he carefully avoids addressing the questions put forward by Koçyiğit in the form of verses which clearly contradict his argument by their exclusivistic tones, especially this one in 3:85:

> "And whosoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him and in the Hereafter, he will be one of the losers."

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[200] Koçyiğit, *"Muslims Have Monopoly over Paradise,"* 90-92.
[201] *The Qur'an* 50:30 where the verse reads "On the day when we will say to Hell: 'Are you filled?' It will say: 'Are there any more [to come]?'" As Ateş rightly points out, the verse does not, in any case, suggest that the people will go to Hell outnumber those who will go to Heaven (Ateş, *"Can Anyone Monopolise Paradise?,"* 35).
[202] Koçyiğit, *"Muslims Have Monopoly over Paradise,"* 90.
[203] That is Muslims and *ahl al-kitab* can marry each other, though historically speaking Muslims did not allow their daughters to marry non-Muslims because of its possible ill-effects on the children due to the father's authority in the family. Basically Islamic community did not want their children born of Muslim daughters to be brought up in religions other than Islam.
[204] See, for example, *the Qur'an* 2:221 which clearly forbids any marriage contract between a Muslim and an unbeliever. (*mushrikat* and *mushrikun*).
[205] Talbi, M, *"A Community of Communities: The Right to Be Different and the Ways of Harmony,"* in The Experience of Religious Diversity, ed. J Hick and H Askari, Hants, England and Brookfield, Vermont: Gower Publishing, 1985, 80.
[206] *The Qur'an* 17:54; 3:74; 43:32; 4:53; 2:25, 177; 16:97; 20:45; 19:60; 20:82; 25:70.
[207] Ateş, *"Can Anyone Monopolise Paradise?,"* 30.

Ateş leaves himself open to criticism by not making a connection between this and 2:62 and 5:69 verses, where Allah conditionally grants salvation to others besides Muslims, on which Ateş bases his argument. Koçyiğit accuses Ateş of taking verses out of their context in order to prove his convictions. He believes that 3:85 is the general rule, whereas 2:62 and 5:69 just posit a tactical missionary signal for Muslims in their dealing with other religions. Depending on a *hadith* reported by Ibn Abbas, some exclusivist scholars believe that 2:62 and 5:69 have been abrogated by 3:85.[208] This weakens Ateş's argument. To make a full evaluation of this issue, I will come back to it later in the last chapter.

As regards abrogation, Koçyiğit believes that bits and pieces of coinciding truths between the Qur'an and the Old and New Testaments do not prove that abrogation did not take place. He seeks to see the results and judges the belief of the people of the book according to the Islamic principles. He concludes that their holy books did not prevent them committing the gravest of all sins: the formulation of the doctrines of Incarnation and trinity which makes them infidels.[209] Furthermore, he reaffirms his basic conviction that faith in Muhammad's message requires total obedience to him and the Qur'an. If one follows what the Qur'an says, one does not need either the Old or the New Testament, because the Qur'an is better than them in all aspects.[210]

A few comments are necessary here. Firstly, Koçyiğit's example of incarnation does not help his argument, because Ateş also agrees with him that those who believe in the incarnation or the Trinity will not be saved in the light of verses of the Qur'an 5:72-73.[211] Secondly, we witness that Ateş, for first time ever, approaches the issue more philosophically and existentially, as we shall see in Hick after his move to Birmingham. He makes the general point that Allah is the god of love, merciful and compassionate. Thus his "mercy embraces everything."[212] Ateş considers the effects of environment on individuals in choosing what they choose, e.g. the accident of birth in being a follower of a religion.[213] If we take the exclusivist (or monopolist in Ateş's terms) argument and say that only Muslims will be saved, which is equivalent to approximately one billion out of five billion of the world population, we will be narrowing down the Qur'anic message to our local understanding. In fact, if we examine Islam carefully, he continues, even among Muslims certain denominations claim to have the key to Heaven and among a denomination certain groups believe only their brand of Islam will save people, and so on. The result might be, he suggests, only two million lucky jackpot winners who will be eligible to go to Heaven. He finishes first by asking how we can reconcile this idea with

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[208] *The Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, trans. Al-Hilali, M Taqi-ud-Din and M M Khan, Riyadh: Dar'us-Salam Publications, 1996, 34, 231.
[209] Koçyiğit, *"Muslims Have Monopoly over Paradise,"* 90.
[210] Koçyiğit, *"Muslims Have Monopoly over Paradise,"* 93-94.
[211] Ateş, *"Can Anyone Monopolise Paradise?,"* 32.
[212] *The Qur'an* 7:156.
[213] *GHMN*, 44 and *GUF*, 132.

the verse "my mercy embraces everything,"[214] and answers by quoting more positive and rewarding verses from the Qur'an for those who do righteous work regardless of which religion they belong to.[215]

This is all very well. As I indicated earlier, however, the whole argument does not take Ateş far away from where Koçyiğit stands. Since he, too, at the end, is a strict monotheist and despite his hopeful and seemingly pluralistic start, Ateş soon narrowed down his scale to remain absolutely committed to the first condition, that is total belief in one God. So his understanding of the term *ahl al-kitab* meant to include only the extinct Arian denomination and Unitarians from among Christians, i.e. the heretics of Christianity, and a few good Jews. The vast majority of Christians remain outside the scope of Ateş's project. We also discover that he does not have a good impression of the Jews either. He thinks the majority of them are in error, except a few.[216] And he does not even mention non-theistic religions. Who are we left with, then, in addition to Muslims, who are the only ones saved in the stricter exclusivist argument? Very few indeed. Thus I argue that Ateş's argument, despite its hopeful start, does fail to address the real problem. For me the real issue is how can *we* make sense of the religious disposition of the world regardless of how they see each other? Therefore I cannot understand either the logic of Ateş's insistence on others' acceptance of Islam as a true path to salvation without the need to follow it, or his willingness to judge other religions from within an Islamic perspective. As far as the day to day relations of the religions is concerned, this is useful and meaningful. However, as to the ultimate salvation of a devout religionist, I do think one's attitude to other religions has much to do with one's gaining salvation. Similar to Rahner's "anonymous Christians," Ateş seems to be struggling to make *anonymous muslims* out of Muslims and pseudo-Muslims, but to no avail.

The main difficulty with Ateş's inclusivism is that he never discusses non-theistic religions, which means he is not even inclusivistic in the real sense of the word. That is to say, he argues that people who do not have a belief in a transcendent God (i.e. non-theistic Hindus and Buddhists) cannot achieve salvation since the very core of their belief is wrong. This makes him even lesser an inclusivist than Rahner, since he even refuses to call the followers of the non-theistic religions, such as Hindus and Buddhists, "anonymous muslims." I call Ateş a *partial inclusivist*. One might argue that he might even be considered as an exclusivist, because of the absolute connection he establishes between the belief in one transcendent God and salvation. But, in all fairness, I believe that he is an inclusivist, for he accepts that there is salvation outside Islam. Nevertheless, his inclusivism is unsatisfactory, since it leaves a considerable proportion of devout religionists outside the scheme of salvation.

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[214] *The Qur'an* 7:156.
[215] *The Qur'an* 13:19-25 and 25:63-77.
[216] Ateş, *"Nobody Has Monopoly over Paradise,"* 12.

Ateş spent laudable efforts, especially with his encouraging start of three basic principles of salvation (believing in one God, the Last Day and doing good deeds). However, in the end he failed to develop this further and fell back to a position very close to exclusivism with his exclusion of not only non-theistic religions but also sincere Trinitarian Christians and orthodox Jews. The inadequacy of both the exclusivist al-Maturidi and the inclusivist Ateş's solutions to religious diversity, I believe, demonstrate that traditional answers do not satisfactorily solve the problem. We may then turn to examine the claims of pluralism, which has radical solutions for the question of the plurality of religions.

1.3.4. Pluralism: A Muslim Approach

Pluralism, as advocated by its most prominent exponent Hick, relativises the salvific monopoly of any particular religion, declaring that no religion is either *the* only way of salvation/liberation (as the exclusivists would have us believe), or has any final *superiority* over other traditions (as the inclusivists imply). The pluralist doctrine holds that the great world religions are each equally efficient ways of perceiving the Real. As religious animals, we human beings manifest different responses to divine revelation, according to the way we were brought up. Thus different world religions are different ways of achieving "salvation/liberation" as "human transformation from self-centredness to Reality-centredness."

As an example of pluralism I shall consider Mohammed[217] Arkoun, a contemporary Muslim theologian and philosopher. Arkoun is a special case among contemporary Muslim thinkers. Born an Algerian Muslim, he grew up on the "fringes of the Arab, Islamic, and European worlds."[218] He is a "product of French schools and the French university system,"[219] which, I think, had a profound effect on his thought. Thus one can observe strong connections in his writings with "structural linguistics, the post-structuralist writings of Paul Ricoeur and Michel Foucault, and the deconstructionism of Jacques Derrida."[220]

Even though Arkoun widened his scope of teaching by different activities in America, Africa and Asia, in addition to Europe, he does not get as much attention as he deserves. Robert D Lee ties this to several reasons, the most important of which is that Arkoun is decidedly a stern critic of orthodoxy and a "radical" liberalist which puts him into direct opposition to the "vision of Islam" "espoused officially in most of the Muslim

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[217] The most widely used transliteration in academical circles in English for the name Muhammad is "Muhammad," including the Prophet Muhammad's name, which I follow throughout the thesis. However, I depart from this general usage in Arkoun's name and follow his spelling as "Mohammed," The difference probably arises because of the spelling differences of the foreign names between the French and the English languages.

[218] Lee, R D, *"Foreword,"* in *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, by M Arkoun, San Francisco and Oxford: Westview Press, 1994, viii.

[219] He received his PhD from the Sorbonne, where he also teaches "Islamic history and philosophy." (Lee, *"Foreword,"* viii).

[220] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 68.

world."[221] This critical radical liberalism towards "all religious traditions" and worldviews might be the crossing point between Hick and Arkoun, who first met in 1977 in Birmingham[222] and then came to know Hick personally when they were both teaching in Claremont Graduate School. When I interviewed Hick in November 1997 and asked him who was the most original Muslim thinker he had met so far, his answer without hesitation was Arkoun. Nevertheless, to my knowledge they do not refer directly to each other's works and their method is almost totally different. Arkoun belongs to the most recent continental philosophy by which he argues for a "historical-sociological-anthropological approach," in addition to the more common "theological and philosophical."[223] Hick, on the other hand, belongs to the more traditionalist philosophy and heavily relies on Wittgenstein instead of continental hermeneutics headed by Derrida.

In his book *Qur'an, Liberation & Pluralism*, Farid Esack examines Arkoun's thought and detects four key elements on which he bases his philosophy:

1. Revelation and language: Arkoun begins with societies as the centre of the linguistic activity. Human beings become aware of themselves in "societies through various changing 'uses' (activity, experience, sensation, observation etc.)." Uses in societies, Arkoun believes, are transferred into "signs" which are used in expressing realities "'through languages as systems of signs.'"[224] All of these happen before "any interpretation of revelation" takes place. We know that scripture is proclaimed by means of the "'natural languages'" comprised of "systems of signs" and "each sign is a 'locus of convergent operations,' i.e. perception, expression, interpretation, translation, communication, 'which engages all of the relations between language and thought.'"[225] This approach engenders two significant bearings on "traditional thinking:" firstly, the importance of Arabic as a sacred language is "no longer tenable" and secondly, "the core of Islamic thought is represented as a linguistic and semantic issue."[226]

2. Historicity: "The semiotic productions" of a human being such as "signs and symbols" "in the process of his or her social and cultural emergence are inextricably bound to historicity. *As a semiotic articulation of meaning for social and cultural uses,* the Qur'an is subject to historicity."[227] Arkoun effectively argues that "*there is no access to the absolute* outside the phenomenal world of our historical terrestrial existence" which makes "historicity as a dimension of the truth" that is moulded by "changing tools, concepts, definitions and postulates."[228] He furthermore raises more important questions as to how we should understand the Qur'an with its historicity. He asks: "How can we

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[221] Lee, *"Foreword,"* xii.
[222] Arkoun, M, *"Islam and the Hegemony of the West,"* in God, Truth and Reality: Essays in Honour of John Hick, ed. A Sharma, New York: St Martin's Press, 1993, 86.
[223] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 69.
[224] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 69.
[225] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 69.
[226] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 69.
[227] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 69.
[228] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 80.

deal with the sacred, the spiritual, the transcendent, the ontology, when we are obliged to recognise that all this vocabulary is supposed to refer to stable immaterial values, is submitted to the impact of historicity?"[229]

3. Faith and discourse: Faith in religious discourse is neither an element "independent of human beings" nor is related to a "divine will or grace." Instead it is "'shaped, expressed and actualised in and through discourse.'"[230]

4. Classical Islamic Studies: Arkoun is quite sure that as the tools of "legitimization" for the "traditional system" "classical Islamic theology and Islamic jurisprudence and their vocabulary" do not possess any "epistemological relevance"[231] for us today. The reason for this is, Arkoun claims, that their results and findings are severely damaged by the "biases imposed by the ruling class and its intellectual servants."[232]

It appears that Arkoun's four cornerstones in building up his philosophy revolve around the problems of language and historicity, which have important bearings on revelation and the holy scriptures. To elaborate this further, I will examine his understanding of the process of revelation. Arkoun divides revelation into three levels.[233] First comes the ultimate level where the Word of God is "transcendent, infinite, and unknown to humankind as a whole." What we receive through prophets is only "fragments of it."[234] Here Arkoun is referring to the Qur'anic notion of *al-Lawh al-Mahfuz* (the well-preserved tablet)[235] and that of the *Umm al-Kitab* (the archetypal Book).[236] The second level is the prophetic "manifestations of the word of God" through prophets. The revelations carried out by the "Israelite prophets (in Hebrew), Jesus of Nazareth (in Aramaic) and Muhammad (in Arabic). This is the period of the mental preservation, e.g. memorisation, and of the oral transmission of the revelations. The third level is where the "textual objectification of the word of God takes place."[237] Thus we have the Old Testament, the New Testament and the "Arabic-language Qur'an," which Arkoun calls the *mushaf* that contains "the book composed of pages where the Qur'anic discourse is transcribed."[238] He describes each of these holy scriptures as a "Closed

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[229] Arkoun, M, *"The Concept of Authority in Islamic Thought,"* in Islam, State and Society, eds. K and M M Ferdinand, London: Curzon Press, 1988, 70. For more on this see: Arkoun, M, *Al-fikr al-Islami: Qira'a Ilmiyye*, trans. Salih, H, Beirut: Markaz al-Inma al-Qawmi, 1987, 113-137.
[230] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 80.
[231] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 70.
[232] Arkoun, *"The Concept of Authority in Islamic Thought,"* 64.
[233] Arkoun heavily relies on Paul Ricoeur on this typology (Ricoeur, P, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, trans. and ed., Thompson, John, Cambridge: CUP, 1981, 15-16 and *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, London: SPCK, 1981, 15).
[234] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 70.
[235] *The Qur'an* 85:22.
[236] *The Qur'an* 43:4; Arkoun, M, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, trans. Lee, Robert D, San Francisco and Oxford: Westview Press, 1994, 16, 32.
[237] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 70.
[238] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 33.

Official Corpus:"[239] "*Official* because they resulted from a set of decisions taken by 'authorities' recognised by the community" and "*closed*" because nobody was permitted any longer to add or subtract a word, to modify a reading in the Corpus now declared authentic."[240] Up to now it was the "descending movement of the Word of God" and from here we see the "ascending movement of the interpreting community towards salvation."[241]

Following on from this, we may now look at what Arkoun means by revelation in a broader sense. He redefines revelation as: "the accession to the interior space of a human being... of some novel meaning that opens up unlimited opportunities or backcurrents of meaning for human existence."[242] It changes "man's view of his condition, his *being-in-the-world*, his participation in the production of meaning."[243] It also continually "feeds a living tradition that permits the community to resupply itself periodically with the radical novelty of the original message; all the while secularisation and transcendentalization are tending to pervert and freeze the liberating vista of revelation."[244]

Two points are in order here. The first relates to the orthodox Muslims' understanding of revelation. They believe that revelation as the "'manifestations of the word of God through prophets" (that is, Arkoun's second level) came to an end by Muhammad, since he was the last of the prophets.[245] How can one, particularly a Muslim, understand Arkoun's definition within this context? Unfortunately, Arkoun does not touch on this issue. This brings us to my second point. That Arkoun's understanding of

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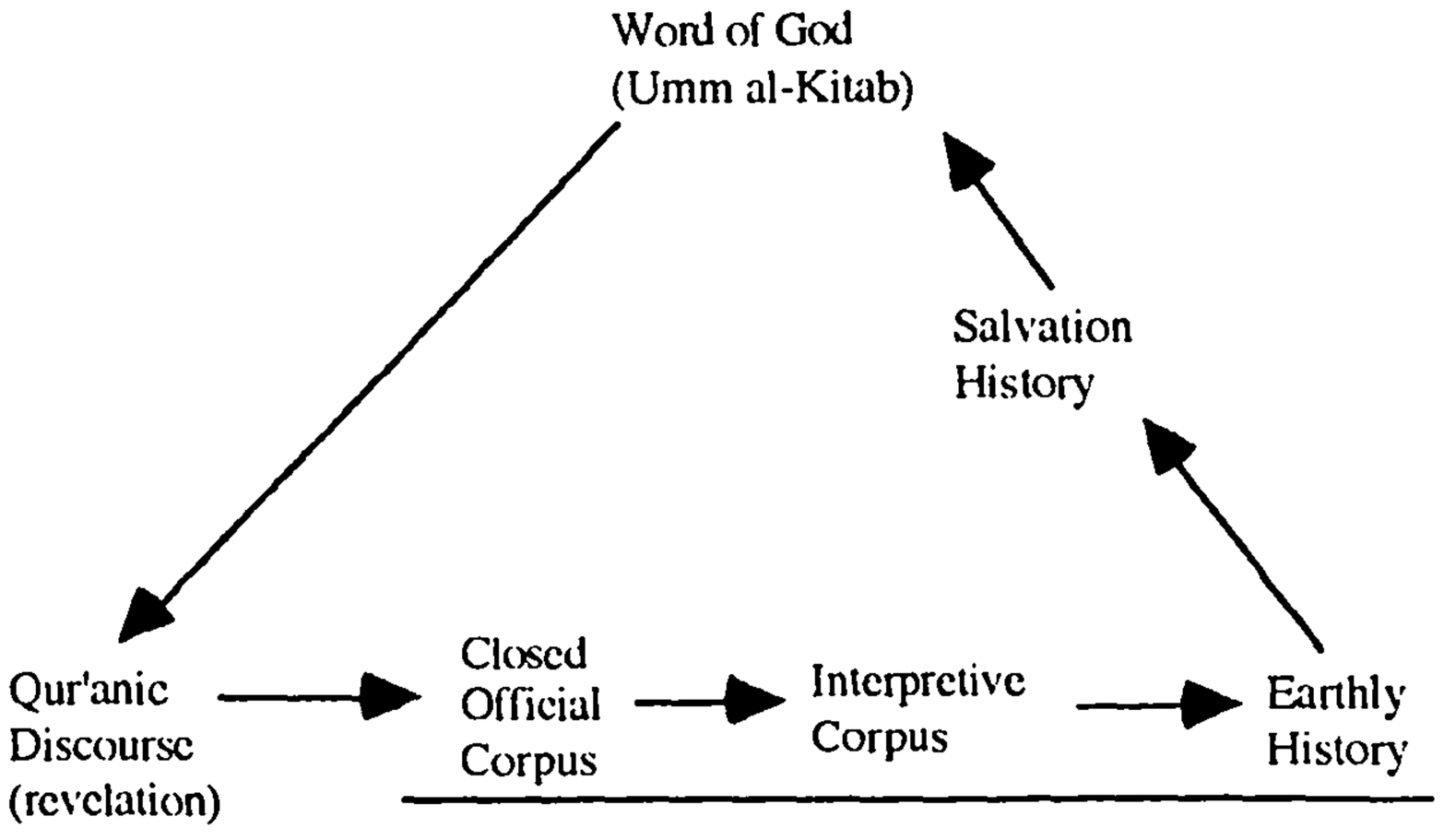
[239] He also calls them "the official sacred Texts" (Arkoun, M, *"Religion and Society: The Example of Islam,"* in Islam in a World of Diverse Faiths, ed. Cohn-Sherbok, D, London: Macmillan, 1991, 156).

[240] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 33.

[241] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 70; Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 37-38. Arkoun illustrates the revelatory process on the one hand and the interpretive community's relation to it on the other as follows:



Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 38.

[242] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 34.

[243] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 34.

[244] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 34.

[245] *The Qur'an* 33:40.

revelation seems to be vague, since his definition mostly seems to relate to "inspiration," rather than revelation.

In explaining the advantages of this broader sense of revelation, Arkoun argues that it:

> "has the merit of making a place for the teachings of Buddha, Confucius, African elders, and all the great voices that recapitulate the collective experience of a group in order to project it toward new horizons and enrich the human experience of the divine. We manage thus to guide ourselves toward another variety of religious thought and go beyond all previous experience with the sacred."[246]

This is as much pluralist as one can be, certainly as broad as Hick's hypothesis. But it seems to me too theoretical, optimistic and romantic. It is not clear what Arkoun is arguing for. Is it a new universal religion of love stemming from all religions, carefully cleansed of their political or otherwise theories? If it is, then, as any critique of postmodernism will tell, this is another type of Western hegemony, to which Arkoun also sternly opposes. If not, how can one understand his belief that we might "guide ourselves toward another variety of religious thought and go beyond all previous experience with the sacred?"[247] Or is it simply the enrichment of the followers of different religions through co-operation, toleration and respect for each other? Is this practically possible, can one describe this as romanticism?

Arkoun concentrates his criticism on the three revealed Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but this is purely "out of a desire for clarity and simplicity" not because of any "preference of any kind to the revealed religions."[248] I believe his broader sense of revelation I just quoted bears witness to this testimony. Thus his conclusions apply not only to Judeo-Christian-Islamic but also to other religions.

Arkoun is well aware of the roots of the problem between the three revealed religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Speaking on behalf of classical Islam, he summarises the "perceptual framework" of dividing the world "theologically and juridically" into two: "the home of Islam (*dar al-Islam*), where the Divine Law applied, and the land of war (*dar al-harb*) where 'infidels' always threatened to substitute 'pagan' laws for the True Law,"[249] Islam. He also remarks that Christianity was also seeing the world in the same way before the Vatican Council II in 1965. In Islam, this dual division of the world gave a "special status for 'protected peoples' (*dhimmi*), Jews and Christians as peoples of the Book (*ahl al-kitab*) but as theologically beyond the 'community promised salvation' (*al-firqa al-najiya*)."[250] He is quick to point out that "today's Jews and Christians are wrong to use this status as a theme of polemics against today's Muslims." What they should rather do is, he continues, to "deal with this problem as

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[246] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 34.
[247] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 34.
[248] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 21.
[249] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 10.
[250] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 10.

historians would, avoiding the anachronism of projecting the philosophy of human rights and religious liberty... onto a theological mentality *common* to the three revealed religions."[251] Arkoun also believes that "the theological vision" dividing "time into *before* and *after* the founding moment of new salvation" is common to all three. "Jews, Christians and Muslims thus have their respective eras, and all face this question about the theological position of human beings who lived before the 'final' revelation was manifest."[252] I am very curious to discover how someone like Arkoun makes such a category mistake, since, to my knowledge, Islam radically differs from Judaism and Christianity in its understanding regarding those "who lived before the 'final' revelation was manifest." Islam has neither a *chosen nation* nor a *God incarnate*. The problem just does not exist in Islam, simply because of the central belief in the universality and as well as continuity of revelation, as these verses attest:

> "We, indeed, sent among every people an apostle" (16:36).
>
> "There was never any people without a warner having lived among them" (35:24).[253]

It is also common knowledge that Muhammad did not bring anything new or different in terms of faith from the previous prophets. His message was the same as Adam's, Abraham's, Moses', etc.: to spread faith in one God. Thus the Qur'an refers to previous prophets as *muslims*, submitters to the will of Allah.[254] I do believe that Arkoun is seriously mistaken in this generalisation.

Arkoun is a firm believer in historicism which runs through all his writings. Thus he admires the historicist methods of Max Weber and Troeltsch in examining religion, something which, he thinks, is lacking in the writings of the *Nahdha* and the *Thawra* movements'[255] supporters by the beginning of this century in the Muslim-Arab world.[256] In this respect, revelations also receive their share from 'historicity.' Arkoun sees revelations as historical materials, mostly manipulated by power seekers or their servants, though this does not stop them still being tools providing salvation. In Arkoun's world where historicity prevails, as Lee puts it nicely, "there would be no margins and no centre, no marginalized groups and no dominant ones, no inferior beliefs and no superior, truth-producing logic."[257] Thus Arkoun claims:

> "All 'believers' whether they adhere to revealed religions or contemporary secular religions, would thus be *equally* constrained to envisage the question of meaning not from the angle of unchanging transcendence -that is of an ontology sheltered from all historicity- but in the light of historical forces that transmute the most sacred values, those regarded as most divine by virtue of their symbolic capital and as inseparable from necessarily mythical accounts of

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[251] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 10.
[252] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 10.
[253] Cf. other verses in *the Qur'an* 2:115; 4:163-165; 6:130-131; 13:7; 23:44.
[254] *The Qur'an* 2:128 and 3:67, cf. 40:78; 42:13
[255] These are movements produced in the Arab-Islamic world in order to combat modernism. The main advocates Arkoun mentions are Taha Husein, al-'Aqqad, H. Haykal and A. Abd al-Raziq (Arkoun, *"Religion and Society,"* 173).
[256] Arkoun, *"Religion and Society,"* 174.
[257] Lee, *"Foreword,"* viii.

> the founding, and from which each ethnocultural group extracts and recognises what it calls identity or personality."[258]

One of the most daring consequences of Arkoun's historicist approach is the case of the Qur'an, which, I believe, will irritate many Muslims, to say the least. He proposes a "progressive-regressive reading of the Qur'an" as to explain the relevance of the Holy Scriptures to us:

> "...We go back to the past not to project on fundamental texts the demands and the needs of the present Muslim societies -as the *islahi ulama* [reformist scholars] do- but to discover the historical mechanisms and factors which produced these texts and assigned them such functions (= regressive procedure). At the same we cannot forget that these texts are still alive, active as an ideological system of beliefs and knowledge shaping the future. We have, then, to examine the process of transformation of initial contents and functions into new ones (= progressive procedure)."[259]

Arkoun also calls this reading a "semiotic analysis" as opposed to the traditional reading of the Qur'an.[260] I concur on the whole with Arkoun's suggested reading of the Qur'an, which is the hermeneutical reading that I will argue for as a modification in Hick's thesis against his mythical/metaphorical reading. We shall see a good example of this hermeneutical reading by Farid Esack, in chapter five, on the concept of *kufr* (unbelief). However, my reservation lies in his vague balance between "historicity" on the one hand and "aliveness" on the other. We are not given any criterion according to which we can draw a line between the two. And what does Arkoun mean by "alive?" How different is it from or what assurances do we have that this aliveness is not like the *life* that Don Cupitt and D. Z. Philips find in their non-realist reading of the Bible?

Arkoun's final solution lies in developing the Western liberal secularism which stems from and is enriched by the great world religions. It is worth quoting him once more:

> "The immense task of effectively secularising society will at last find adequate, direct, and critical expression in a discourse that is both scientific and secular. Secularism will cease being a scarecrow once citizens are freely able to choose their opinions, beliefs, and ways of religious expression without social pressure. Religion will then become, like Christianity in the West, a source of spiritual enrichment for the self-sufficient, private individual, rather than a civic duty that the citizen must comply with... This will be an essential step in the

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[258] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 9.

[259] Arkoun, *"The Concept of Authority in Islamic Thought,"* 56.

[260] Arkoun, *"Religion and Society,"* 158-159. In another context, Arkoun expresses similar points:

> "Rather than pursuing its urgent responsibility of raising new questions about the function of religion in human existence, the philosophy underlying Islamic-Christian dialogue continues to propagate the fiction of an eternally unchanging Reason, which illuminated by revelation, rooted in the ontology of the holy scriptures, and consequently infallible in its dealings and statements. -For this reason I, for one, call for a new critical reading of the scriptures (Bible, Gospels, Qur'an) and a philosophical critique of exegetical and theological reason" (Küng, H and et al., *Christianity and the World Religions: Paths of Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism*, trans. Heinegg, Peter, London: SCM, 1993, 67, cited from *Religion in Culture, Law and Politics*, ed. Abdullah, M S, 1982, pp. 141 f).

> secularisation of reflection and culture, and will thus focus on man, society, history and the world..."[261]

It is clear that Arkoun's understanding of secularity, society and religion carries strong flavours from John Locke's liberalism and the French philosopher Auguste Comte's positivism.[262] One may even call Arkoun's understanding of Islam a *Christianised Islam*. That is, the important legal, social and political aspects are pruned and what is left is only a spiritual resource for those interested in religion. Islamically speaking, especially as far as the exclusivist and the inclusivist understandings are concerned, this is very repugnant interpretation of Islam. Arkoun is severely criticised for it. Mohammed Khan, for instance, detects "two basic enlightenment prejudices" prevalent in Arkoun's "entire work." First, "unlike most Muslim scholars" who assert that "Islam is much much more than a religion," Arkoun is satisfied with the "modern definition of religion."[263] "Religion, as understood today," Khan continues, "is a post-enlightenment concept that privileges the secular over sacred. It reduces the scope of religion to the private sphere by removing the public domain to a religion free autonomous sphere of politics."[264] The second deficiency Khan spots in Arkoun's work is that it also "carries pejorative connotations by placing religion in conflict with reason and science. Once we concede that Islam is a religion, then all the modern dichotomies which undermine religion such as science versus religion, reason versus revelation come into play."[265] Khan thinks that to use such categories is on Arkoun's part "indicative of inconsistency in reasoning" and that "he is a prisoner of modern categories," despite his claim of rising "above the narrow confines of modernity."[266] I, however, strongly object to Khan's second point that Arkoun introduces "modern dichotomies" undermining religion. It is enough to look at the history of Islamic philosophy to realise that Khan's supposedly modern dichotomies such as "science versus religion, reason versus revelation" are not new, but they are age-long discussions that occupied Muslim minds.

To those criticising Arkoun as advocating the universality of the "Western model," he responds by making a call to move forward beyond the "dualist thought which for centuries has opposed the spiritual to the temporal, faith to reason, the soul to matter,"[267] "reason against imagination, history against myth, true against false, good against evil."[268] In another context, as a feature of a newly emerging rationality, he calls for a "conflict of hermeneutics," which instead of siding with one opponent against another, it

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[261] Arkoun, *"Islam and the Hegemony of the West,"* 83-84.
[262] Kadioğlu, A, *"Republican Epistemology and Islamic Discourses in Turkey in the 1990s,"* The Muslim World 88, no. 1, 1998, 7-9.
[263] Khan, M A M, *"Review Article: Epistemological Poverty or Poverty of Epistemology,"* The Muslim World 87, no. 1, 1997, 77.
[264] Khan, *"Epistemological Poverty ,"* 77.
[265] Khan, *"Epistemological Poverty ,"* 77.
[266] Khan, *"Epistemological Poverty ,"* 77.
[267] Arkoun, *"Islam and the Hegemony of the West,"* 83-84.
[268] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 37.

tries to understand both, compares them and studies their successes and failures.[269] Arkoun also acknowledges that the Western model is not complete as it is and needs to be improved. He thinks that scientific thought "has failed to objectify the nature of the religious"[270] which has created a spiritual vacuum that is filled with the repetition of old cycles. In the Islamic world, it has resulted in movements calling for going back to religion with a political agenda and in the West[271] it has resulted in the reaffirmation of "the untouchability and universality" of the Western model which Arkoun vehemently opposes as a form of hegemony and "the tyranny of reason."[272] In order to overcome the spiritual poverty in modern societies and enrich secularism, he appeals to the notion of "the ideal person, the perfect human being, *al-insan al-kamil*" from the Islamic world[273] and more generally to a "nostalgia for being, inseparable from the '*dur désir de durer*' (the determination to live on) that grips every mind coming into contact with the promise of eternal life,"[274] supported by the "Holy Scriptures" and common to the believers of the three revealed religions. As will be seen in Hick's pluralism, Arkoun also exemplifies this notion of being with the lives of "saints, mystics and thinkers." Consequently, he argues that:

> "This irreducible fact about human beings from societies of the Book seeks expression and reincarnation in the multiple forms and types of existence proffered by modernity. Scientific thought tends to diminish this constitutive element of the person rather than to integrate it into an effort to enhance human beings by means other than the rationalised imaginary, which all too often replaces the mythical imaginary."[275]

Arkoun's "historico-anthropological perspective" on revelation and its relation to the community of believers is also charged with reductionism; that is, it is a "scientific reduction of something essentially transcendental."[276] Another critique describes Arkoun's approach as "*secularis[ing] the sacred* by subjecting the Qur'an and revelation to scientific analysis."[277] He refutes this charge on two bases. One is that his method contains the transcendental and does not place it "beyond the parameters of 'the true rationality.'" The other is his distinction between the "theological reason" and "the critical reason." He argues that the former belongs to "the collective *imaginaire*" which cannot realise that "it produces *imaginaire* rather than rationality," whereas the latter, critical reason, not only recognises this difference but also includes "the theological

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[269] Arkoun, M, *"Temellendirme Açmazı Karşısında Fundamentalism" (Fundamentalism Before the Dichotomy of Reorigination)*, İslamiyat, no. 4, 1998, 84.
[270] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 101.
[271] In Arkoun's understanding, the concept of the West is wider than usually understood. In addition to Europe, the USA, it also includes Japan, Korea and other developing "financial and industrial powers" (Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 130, fn.. 6).
[272] Lee, *"Foreword,"* ix.
[273] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 103.
[274] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 103.
[275] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 103.
[276] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 70-71.
[277] Khan, *"Epistemological Poverty ,"* 76.

reason."[278] Arkoun illustrates this dichotomy well by drawing a parallel between revolutions and revelations whereby the "social hierarchies and political, economic, and cultural inequalities" that they seek to eradicate are "reconstituted" through secularisation and transcendentalization in the absence of a critical reason.[279] But as will be seen in the following paragraph Arkoun's claim to have critical reason is refuted by the critiques of postmodernism.

The criticisms levelled against postmodern thinking are also directed against Arkoun's proposal, which, as will be seen in the following chapters, are also directed against Hick. It is obvious that Arkoun establishes a link "between the formulation of ideas and our histories." However, as Esack rightly stresses, everything goes into this basket which includes "scholars, their critiques of the theories of knowledge and the way it was produced, as well as the intellectualist solutions which they offer."[280] It is not possible for one to "view revelation and tradition historically and ideologically and then take an ahistorical or ideology-free view of oneself and one's own critique."[281] Arkoun's claim about the autonomous reason freed from "outside authorities (revelation, church, *shari'a*, state)" as the only producer of ideology-free "knowledge as a sphere of authority to be accepted and respected unanimously"[282] at best looks utopian. Thus Esack scrutinises Arkoun's "critique of the authority structures" for failing to recognise "other systems of meaning such as academicism" in addition to the well-known "formal institutions." Esack also raises the problematic connection which exists between modernity and liberal ideology. He believes that "modernity" is an "appendage to liberal ideology" to which lots of "hegemonic interests" are attached.[283] I concur with Esack, especially when I consider "Foucault's work on the inter-relatedness of power and knowledge and Edward Said's use of Foucauldian methods to demonstrate the discursive violence that has been perpetrated on Islam by Western methods."[284]

Then there is the unanimous acceptance of the ideology-free "knowledge" as an authority. It becomes an ideology which may fall in the trap that poses a threat against the very project that Arkoun proposes, as happened in the revelations and revolutions.[285] Furthermore, Esack suggests that "knowledge, like any other social tool, while it can be critical, is never neutral" and "'every hermeneutic entails conscious or unconscious partisanship.'"[286]

Esack's last critique concerns a charge which is aimed at Hick as well, as we shall see later. The point is that Arkoun's thought implies that "there can be a class of 'super readers,' expert historians or linguists who will be able to access the true meaning of a

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[278] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 71.
[279] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 59.
[280] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 72.
[281] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 72.
[282] Arkoun, *"The Concept of Authority in Islamic Thought,"* 68.
[283] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 72.
[284] Khan, *"Epistemological Poverty ,"* 76.
[285] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 59; Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 72-73.
[286] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 72.

text."[287] Esack claims that this creates different meanings for different groups: we have, on the one hand, the "'objective' intellectuals" who have "independent knowledge" and on the other, the ordinary believers "for whom the text is a living document."[288] While I sympathise with Esack's point about the "class of super readers," I am not quite sure if this directly relates to the problem of different meanings for different groups. As long as there is a text to be interpreted, there will always be different meanings, as have happened in the past, whether we have super readers or not. Esack also believes that, effectively, Arkoun's method of gaining "independent knowledge" puts intellectuals "outside and above" the majority of "believers" by overlooking the contemporary relevance of the text for "people of faith."[289] But, here, Esack seems to be missing the important point that "independent knowledge" does not necessarily mean knowledge which is irrelevant to the contemporary situation of the people of faith. It is worth noting in this regard that the text is as much a "living document" for the scholars as it is for "the majority of the believers."

Despite the fact that Arkoun accepts and argues for pluralism, I find his over all argument unsuccessful and immature. Brendan Sweetman's critique of Derrida's postmodernism is equally applicable to Arkoun's arguments, that is, they are mostly *asserted rather than argued*.[290] As I pointed out in several instances, such as 'revelation', 'historicism', 'aliveness' are unclear and obscurely used, which is another charge Sweetman levels against Derrida.[291] I strongly disagree with his uncompromising historicity as the ultimate judge overarching everything in any assessment, especially its application to holy scriptures.

I also have reservations about his understanding of secularism and religion. While I share his aspiration for mutual coexistence, including believers as well as non-believers, I object to his propagation of secularism as the only ideal, value-free and non-authoritarian solution. This, as one critique put it, is "secularis[ing] the sacred."[292] His total commitment to secularism blinds him to see the power struggle between different authorities in society and also the debilitating effects of secularism on individuals in general, religions and their followers in particular. It seems to me a contradiction to suggest on the one hand the *Christianisation of Islam* to move on to secularism as the ultimate model of living and on the other hand to appeal to the model of "perfect human being" (*al-insan al-kamil*) in Islam to correct the very product of the secularist model. Unlike Hick, he fails to recognise that "saints," who are the role models whom Arkoun also aspires to, are the product of mostly religious rather than secular systems. His

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[287] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 73.
[288] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 73.
[289] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 73.
[290] Sweetman, B, *"Postmodernism, Derrida, and Différance: A Critique,"* International Philosophical Quarterly 39, 1999, 12-14.
[291] Sweetman, B, *"Postmodernism,"* 18.
[292] Khan, M A M, *"Epistemological Poverty,"* 76.

solution of moving beyond the dualistic conflict-based thinking, though consoling at first sight, at best sounds utopian to me.

More specifically, Arkoun is concerned with the methodological issues in assessing cultures and civilisations. Apart from historicism, we have not been given any criterion as how to assess religions, their salvific efficacy, conflicting truth-claims, different conceptions of the Ultimate, etc. In conclusion, I suggest that we need a more comprehensive theory and move on to examine Hick's in the next chapter.

1.4. Partial Conclusions

Despite all prophecies about the eventual disappearance of God and religion from modern society, it seems that the concept of some kind of ultimate being and religious forms of life will continue in evidence for quite some time yet. What is more, as Arkoun rightly points out, the rapid developments in science and its implications for societies have not satisfied the spiritual needs of human beings. However, changes have occurred. Religions and societies grew ever more closer. This put the followers of different religions sometimes in the same city, or street, or neighbourhood, which made them aware of other ways of being religious. This inevitable coexistence of religions made the question of religious pluralism more and more an urgent problem to deal with for the scholars, especially of Christianity.

In this chapter, I have tried to give an account of some Muslim approaches to the question of religious pluralism. In order to do this, as the first attempt in Islam of its kind, I successfully applied Race's three-fold typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism to an Islamic context. I have examined one scholar whose views approximate to each of these approaches. The exclusivist line does not answer the question of "how a compassionate God leaves so many good religionists outside the scheme of salvation/transformation just because they happened to be brought up in a different religious climate." The inclusivist approach faces the same question on a different scale: "why should a just and loving God leave many either in partial darkness or place them in a disadvantaged position as far as salvation/transformation is concerned because of geographical differences which they have no hand in?" The pluralist line seems to me has a more satisfactory answer by portraying religions as different approaches to the same Ultimate Reality, offering effective ways of salvation/liberation. However, the particular pluralist example which I have discussed is not wholly satisfactory for the reasons given above. Thus I move on to examine Hick's hypothesis, which I argue is a better and more comprehensive explanation.[293]

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[293] *ROF*, 51.

CHAPTER TWO

2. THE NEED FOR A PLURALISTIC HYPOTHESIS

"Christ is the population of the world,
and every object as well. There is no room
for hypocrisy. Why use bitter soup for healing
when sweet water is everywhere?"
Rûmî[1]

2.1. Introduction

In chapter one, I presented three Muslim responses to the problem of religious diversity and expressed my discontent with them. I concluded there that we need a more comprehensive theory to explain religious diversity and Hick's might offer this for us. Thus in this chapter my task will be to examine his reasons why we need a pluralistic theory. Hick's theory is a total defence of the religious phenomena both against naturalistic claims and particularistic theories. The first section of the chapter, "why a pluralist theory," focuses on his restatement of religious experience and the phenomenon of religion, while the second evaluates the other explanations for religious diversity. To achieve the first, Hick starts, at the ground level, with proving that experiencing the world religiously is as much justifiable as experiencing any other thing. In "the right to believe," we will follow Hick's recast of religious experiences with anecdote drawn from several sources. One of the important developments in this section is that he extends Wittgenstein's "seeing-as" theory to include all our experience by coining "experiencing-as." The natural consequence of religious experience is the phenomenon of religion. In "the directory of gods," I explore Hick's understanding of religion. In this respect I should mention his refusal to accept a set definition of religion and adopt instead, again from Wittgenstein, the "family resemblance theory." He also adopts the pre and post-axial periodical classification of religious experience of humankind from the history of religions and limits his survey to the great world religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam) of the post-axial period. Then he examines the naturalistic accounts of religion: Sigmund Freud's psychological theory and Émile Durkheim's sociological theory. We finish with his critique of and responses to the exclusivist and inclusivist Christian accounts of religious diversity.

2.2. Why a Pluralistic Hypothesis

In spite of the fact that there are other important pluralists,[2] John Hick is "the most provocative and bold,"[3] "the most radical, the best-known, and therefore the most

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[1] Rumi, J, *Unseen Rain*, 57.
[2] For instance, early in this century, we see Ernst Troeltsch and Arnold Toynbee, and more recently W. Cantwell Smith, R Panikkar and Paul Knitter come to mind.
[3] Gillis, C, *A Question of Final Belief: John Hick's Pluralistic Theory of Salvation*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989, 1.

controversial of the proponents"[4] of a Real-centred philosophy of religions. Hence, I have decided to concentrate on his theory within the limited scope of this thesis.

Hick summarises and restates almost all his theology and philosophy of religions under the light of criticisms in his major and mature work *An Interpretation of Religion*, on which this study will be heavily based. In this book, to explain the need for a pluralist theory, Hick uses a three-fold argument. He starts with the proposition that "it is rational on the part of those who experience religiously to believe and to live on this basis,"[5] a notion which he borrows with slight modification from William James, as developed in his classic work *The Will to Believe*.[6] Hick then moves on to describe the variety displayed in humanity's experience of religious reality, introducing a peculiar name, "the directory of gods,"[7] implying the theistic and non-theistic versions of them. Next he gives us the options for interpreting this variety of experiences of the ultimate; namely the naturalistic option, which claims that all are *in toto delusory*, and the full or partial exclusivist approach, which sees one form or the other as veridical whilst the rest are deemed to be either "false" or "confused and inferior versions of itself."[8] He devotes chapter seven of *An Interpretation* to the rejection of the naturalistic option, which we will be looking at in some detail. To the particularistic explanations, he objects on the grounds of logical inconsistency according to what he calls "the intellectual Golden Rule of granting to others a premise on which we rely ourselves."[9] It follows that "persons living within other traditions, then, are equally justified in trusting their own distinctive religious experience and in forming their beliefs on the basis of it."[10] Having established the logical flaw and discrepancy in this second option too, Hick suggests that we need a *religious* interpretation of religion which proves that "the great post-axial faiths constitute different ways of experiencing, conceiving and living in relation to an ultimate divine Reality which transcends all our varied visions of it."[11]

2.2.1. "The Right to Believe"[12]

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[4] Knitter, P, *No Other Name? A Critical Study of Christian Attitudes Towards the World Religions*, London, SCM Press, 1985, 147.
[5] *AIR*, 233.
[6] James, W, *The Will to Believe*, New York, Dover Pub., 1956.
[7] *AIR*, 234.
[8] *AIR*, 235.
[9] *AIR*, 235.
[10] *AIR*, 235.
[11] *AIR*, 235-36.
[12] James plays with this idea early in his famous essay *The Will to Believe*, originally an address to Philosophy Clubs of Yale and Brown Universities, and later became the title of the collected essays, where he actually uses the phrase once (p.29). He also wrote in a letter that the essay "should have been called by the less unlucky title the *Right* to Believe" (Hick quotes in *FK*, 40 from *The Letters of William James, II*, London, 1920, 207). In one of last essays before his death, James uses the title and with a slight change, *Faith and the Right to Believe*, in which could be found his mature ideas on the issue. The latter has been published posthumously in *Some Problems of Philosophy*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

One thing should be pointed out before we start. Even though the line and the language of Hick's argument may seem to be more compatible with theistic belief than with non-theistic, Hick clearly states and applies the argument to both sorts of traditions.[13]

Having concluded that none of the traditional arguments for the existence of the Real are conclusive (namely ontological, cosmological and design arguments and the argument from "the course of human experience") and therefore religious belief cannot properly be based on any of them, Hick embarks on a different basis for believing and acting religiously. Religious belief, he contends, rests upon "unconsciously interpreting the impacts of the environment in such a way that it is consciously experienced as having the kind of meaning articulated in religious language."[14] He also maintains that this is a "cognitive choice" which carries "the risk of being very importantly mistaken," due to the fact that in this way of life "one is living 'by faith' and not 'by sight,'" a choice which in effect, in Hick's understanding, has some features of *a wager*.[15]

Hick uses Pascal's wager parable with a slight twist. He substitutes for the rationality of belief on the basis of risk to "the rationality, on the part of those who experience 'the presence of God,' of accepting that experience as basically veridical." He also agrees with Pascal that "the justification for theistic belief" does not stem from presumptuous arguments about the existence of God, but rather from the argument for "the rationality of so believing despite the fact that this cannot be proved or shown to be in any objective sense more probable than not."[16]

Hick infers from all these arguments that "it is rational to believe in the reality of God." In other words, "it has been rational for some people in the past, it is rational for some people now, and it will presumably in the future be rational for yet other people to believe in the reality of God." The reasonableness in believing depends largely on one's "cognitive input" which, in this case, is *religious experience*. By religious experience, he means particularly people's reports "of being conscious of existing in God's presence and of living in a personal relationship of mutual awareness with God; and being conscious of their life as part of a vast teleological process whose character as a whole gives meaning to what is presently taking place."[17] What is characteristic in this specification are three main points: the existential status of human beings, personal (or impersonal, in broader sense) relationship with God and teleological meaning in the whole universe (process). Certainly one can question the appropriateness of these principles, especially the last one. Nevertheless, from the basic principle of justification as Hick understands it, one can proceed along Hick's lines in seeing and experiencing the world religiously.

Hick is aware of the fact that this way of experiencing one's environment is not fault-free. He gives the examples of "misperceptions," "illusions," and "hallucinations" as

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[13] *AIR*, 211, 228.
[14] *AIR*, 210.
[15] *AIR*, 210.
[16] *AIR*, 211.
[17] *AIR*, 211.

mistaken experiences. For those who feel the presence of God in their lives, there could also be two interpretations: genuine and delusory. Due to this possible difficulty, Hick once more wishes to pose the question cautiously: the question is "whether it is rational for A to trust his or her experience as veridical and to behave on the basis of it;" and also "whether it is rational for others to believe in the reality of God on the basis of A's report." In other words, "the reference is to the rationality of believing, not of what is believed."[18] Hick then moves on to establish the credibility of trusting in one's experience.

In our daily life, we establish an experiential relationship with our environment which "presupposes a general trust in the veridical character of perceptual experience."[19] This is described as "the principle of credulity" in R Swinburne's theology. That is to say, "what one seems to perceive is probably so. How things seem to be is good grounds for a belief about how things are."[20] To be able to interact with the world, we have to rely on our perceptions and experiences since sensory perception is the only way in which the world is disclosed to us. In the mean time, we are aware of the fact that we are occasionally "subject to illusions, hallucinations and misperceptions of various kinds." This alertness acts as a guarantee to check the correctness of our perceptions, in which case "they fail to cohere with the rest." Thus we end up with "natural belief"[21] or "framework beliefs", as Hick quotes from Kai Nielsen, in which "we cannot help believing and living in terms of the objective reality of the perceived world."[22]

Hick applies the basics of living under the perceived world to religious belief with an appeal to T Penelhum's *Parity Argument*.[23] The argument admits that "it is no more possible to prove the existence of God than the existence of a material world but claims that theistic belief arises like perceptual belief, from a natural response of the human mind to its experiences."[24] Hick exposes this more fully with a quotation from *Faith and Knowledge:*

> "We cannot explain how we are conscious of sensory phenomena as constituting an objective physical environment; we just find ourselves interpreting the data of our experience in this way. We are aware that we live in a real world, though we cannot prove by any logical formula that it *is* a real world... In each case we discover and live in terms of a particular aspect of our environment through an appropriate act of interpretation; and having come to live in terms of it we neither require nor can conceive of any further validation of its reality. The same is true of the apprehension of God. The theistic believer cannot explain *how* she knows the divine presence to be mediated through her human experience. She just finds

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[18] *AIR*, 212.
[19] *AIR*, 213.
[20] Swinburne, R, *The Existence of God*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, 254; cf. his *The Evolution of the Soul*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986, 11-13.
[21] Hick borrows this notion from the late Humean reading by Norman Kemp Smith (*AIR*, 213).
[22] *AIR*, 213.
[23] Penelhum, T, *God and Skepticism*, Dordrecht: D Reidel, 1983. Hick summarises from Chs 6 and 7 of this book.
[24] *AIR*, 214.

> herself interpreting her experience in this way. She lives in the presence of God, though she is unable to prove by any dialectical process that God exists."[25]

Is the relationship between "perceptual and religious experience-and-belief" so simple? Besides the similarities, are there any dissimilarities? What are the possible obstacles confronting the supposedly friendly relationship between the two? Hick now turns to tackling these questions.

To begin with, he reminds us of the general principle that "it is rational to regard our apparently perceptual experiences as veridical except when we have reason to doubt their veridicality." The reasons to doubt may be of two sorts. First, there may be "positive circumstances which could well cause us to be deluded in this case." Second, we might not be aware of such misleading causes, but still "the experience may be so fleeting and discontinuous with the rest of our experience, and /or its implications so dissonant with our existing body of belief, that it is reasonable for us to regard it as delusory, or at least to withhold positive acceptance of it as a genuine 'experience of x.'"[26] For the first kind, he gives the example of someone who under the influence of alcohol sees the floor and the walls moving and for the second type, he mentions a person who observes a pan flying for no apparent reason. Hick concludes by adopting the general principle that "in the absence of adequate grounds for doubt it is rational to trust our putative experience of an external world that is apparently impinging upon us"; we are "in cognitive touch with our environment."[27] To exemplify this, Hick analyses Jesus' experience of existence in the presence of God from Jesus' perspective. For Jesus, "God, as personal loving will, was as real ... as his neighbours or as the hills and rivers and lake of Galilee. The heavenly father was not for him a mere concept or a hypothetical entity, but an experienced living reality."[28] For him to suggest that "there is no heavenly father" would sound as meaningless as to say that someone to whom he had just spoken to did not exist. Hick infers that for such persons as Jesus, it would have been irrational not to believe in the reality of God. Moreover, he boldly states that unless we trust our experience, we cannot even believe that the universe exists which would mean committing "cognitive suicide." The same applies to a religious person who "has a powerful and continuous sense of existing in the presence of God." He or she is "rationally entitled to believe" that "God is real, or exists."[29]

Here Hick makes a few cautionary remarks about his conclusion. One is that despite all strong experience of existing in God's presence, if, alongside others,[30] we arrive "at the knowledge or the well-grounded belief that there is no God," it would be the end of the matter. He illustrates this with "the concept of the deity" being "self-contradictory and thus incapable of being instantiated."[31] As is evident, Hick concedes, some people have surely

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[25] *AIR*, 214 (cited from *Faith and Knowledge*, London: Macmillan, 1987, 132).
[26] *AIR*, 215.
[27] *AIR*, 215.
[28] *AIR*, 216.
[29] *AIR*, 216.
[30] Hick does not say clearly what he means by "some other route" (*AIR*, 217).
[31] *AIR*, 217.

asserted that this was the case. However, as will be seen in the next section, building on the premise that "the universe is religiously ambiguous," that is it could be interpreted both from a naturalistic and a religious perspective, he rejects naturalistic explanations and still finds the religious interpretation "viable."[32]

The second remark is the possibility of being mistaken in the experience. He admits that as happens in other areas of life, naturally, "there are errors and delusions" in religion too. This is indeed the way in which a sceptic sees religion, as totally delusory. Equally some believers argue that their beliefs are true while others' are false. He cites Jim Jones' religious cult, in which Jones caused the suicidal death of himself and some nine hundred members with him at Jonestown, Guyana, in 1978.[33] What then do we do about the mixed experiences of other people, especially the great religious leaders such as Jesus, whom Hick focuses on? How and on what basis can we decide about the veridicality of the "paradigm cases of religious experience occurring within pre-scientific cultures?" Hick points out that Jesus, in addition to his strong experience of existing in the presence of God, has also "experienced certain diseases (such as, possibly, epilepsy) as cases of demon possession (Mark 1:23-26). He may in addition have experienced temptation as the work of Satan."[34] His analogy is that while we accept the case for the existence of God in the light of Jesus' experience, we can reject his experience of disease causing demons because they do not support our mode of thinking about the "modern medical accounts of the aetiology of disease."[35] Hick believes that it was rational for them to hold such beliefs on the basis of their experience, whereas for us it is not. The general principle in this matter is that "it can only be rational for us to hold a belief on the basis of someone else's experience if the belief is compatible with our other beliefs, supported as they are by the general body of our own experience."[36] When we apply the rule to the religious case, we

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[32] *AIR*, 217.

[33] The movement was known as *People's Temple*, founded by the Reverend Jim Jones, "a Christian socialist, in Indianapolis," in the U. S. A. during 1950s. He moved to California in 1965 and established Jonestown, Guyana, in 1977, which was supposed to be "the promised land, allowing freedom from Satanic repression and racism." Jones, becoming more and more "dictatorial and fundamentalist," took world-renunciation to the extreme, which in a way demonstrates the logic behind the tragedy: "better die for heaven above than allow Satan to take over here." The disaster occurred in November 1978 when Jones and 913 followers, who were mainly black, committed suicide by drinking "cyanide-laced, 'Flavor-Aid'." It is suggested that the tragedy was provoked by an inquiry about the cult, led by Congressman Les Ryan and a group of journalists, who were deemed to be "demonic agents" (Bowker, J, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, Oxford and New York: OUP, 1997, 744-745).

[34] *AIR*, 217.

[35] One can question whether this is really a good example and projects the right analogical relation between the two. Coming from a long-term champion of diversity of opinion, this is a very surprising statement to make about epilepsy and other psychological and mental disorders, which sounds very Western-minded. For one thing, to my knowledge, there is no commonly shared explanation and cure of these types of disorders. One should especially remember the French philosopher Michel Foucault's views on *madness*. Secondly, due to this probably wrong diagnosis of the cause, other types of cures have been ignored in the West, such as faith healing. Thirdly, it is possible to have alternative explanations and cures for the disease, which is widely known and practised in the East. This points to the fact that Jesus and Muhammad and others might be right in their experience of demon caused diseases. Therefore, one can say that this might not be the perfect example to illustrate the point.

[36] *AIR*, 218-19.

reach the conclusion that one can only accept "others' religious experience reports as veridical, ... if the beliefs to which they point are such as one judges *may* be true." The existence of God, Hick declares, is such an issue which one can establish by reason that "this is a genuinely important possibility," meaning that "theistic religious experience has to be taken seriously," and therefore, Jesus' experience marks a turning point for some, unlike the "reports of experiences of astrological influences."[37]

Can one raise a question about the consistency of Hick's argument in differentiating between the two experiences as veridical and non-veridical? He holds the "'experience of God's presence,'" as veridical, while the "'experience of disease-causing demons' -or indeed his 'experience of the sun moving round the earth'" -as non-veridical. Hick replies that there is no difficulty in maintaining that one "may be correctly experiencing some aspects of reality whilst falsely experiencing others." This brings us to the fact that the great religious figures were also human beings who, being "historically and culturally conditioned," were no exception to this rule. Thus there is no inconsistency, Hick concludes in affirming one as true because it is compatible with our experience, and the other as inaccurate because it contradicts "our modern medical and astronomical knowledge."[38]

Hick emphasises the fact that this sort of interpretation of religious experience, that is the persistent sense of existence in the presence of God, is not an argument for the existence of God from the traditionally maintained *religious experience*. Hick admits that there could be several explanations for the cause of this sort of experience such as "super-ego," or a "need for cosmic reassurance in face of danger or of the death of a loved one," or "the pressure of one's group," etc. Rather his point is that "we should turn from experiences... to consider the situation of the experiencer" and try to answer the question "what such a person should rationally think and believe on the basis of his or her own experience." Hence he is concerned with "the rationality of believing in the existence of God on the basis of theistic religious experience," not with a direct proof of God's existence. Hick's deduction is that "in the absence of any positive reason to distrust one's experience," "it is rational, sane, reasonable for those whose religious experience strongly leads them to do so to believe wholeheartedly in the reality of God." This is as rational, Hick asserts, as "our beliefs about 'what there is and how things are' in our total environment," which may be caused "directly," such as the experience of a table, and "indirectly," such as the experience of one's life as being lived in the presence of a transcendent God. To be able to reach to this inference, though, we should satisfy two requirements. Firstly, we must "responsibly judge" that it is "possible for such an entity to exist." Secondly, this probability should be provided through "a powerful, persistent and intrusive way which demands belief in its reality." Therefore, it was justified reasonably

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[37] *AIR*, 219.
[38] *AIR*, 220.

for great spiritual leaders like Moses, Jesus, Martin Luther, Muhammad, al-Hallaj, Ramanuja and Guru Nanak to maintain that God exists.[39]

But what of lay people who have never had such experiences and were probably handed down their beliefs from their parents through generations; are they also entitled to hold the belief that God exists? Hick's thought offers them "a secondary kind of religious experience," which comes out of the impression generated by the thought of "moral and spiritual fruits" in the lives of these great religious leaders. In other words, they witness these effects on the religious leaders which lead them to the belief in God. Hick, however, points out that their beliefs will not be as strong as a *"first-hand believer,*[40]owing to the fact that they will be "vulnerable to the kind of sceptical challenge" directed from many aspects of modern life.[41]

However, this does not mean ordinary believers cannot have any religious experience. They do have, Hick contends, "some remote echo or analogue" "of the much more momentous experience of the great religious figures. This echo may not be at all dramatic or memorable."[42] Hick goes on:

> "It may merely be a moment of greatly intensified meaning in the midst of a church, synagogue or mosque service, or in private prayer, or when reading the scriptures or saying a rosary. Or, on a higher level of significance, it may be the sense of a transcendent reality and goodness being disclosed to us at one of the deep points of human experience, love or birth or death; or through the insistent pressure of an ideal, leading to practical commitment against some social evil or for the realisation of some communal good; or in an awareness, when gazing up into the starry night, of the mysterious immensity of space around us; or again, in the presence of mountain or lake, forest or ocean."[43]

Once this hierarchy between the experiences of the great religious figures and of the religious individual has been established, one can reasonably conclude one's experience is bolstered by the great experiences of awareness of God that have impressed one so much. This connection will provide "well enough" a ground for one to "proceed in faith in the footsteps of a great religious leader," even if one's belief will not be "as deeply and solidly grounded as theirs." One should hope that one day one will "ultimately receive" "the full confirmation" of one's faith.[44]

In reply to William Rowe's criticism, Hick next deals with the issue of criteria in trusting one's experience. Rowe argues that the rationality of one's religious belief requires

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[39] *AIR*, 220-21.
[40] Italics are mine. Even though Hick does not explicitly suggest, the implication is that he uses a two-staged category of believers: first-hand and second-hand believer. This very much echoes the division of Muslims in Islamic Sufism: *awaam* (ordinary believers) and *hawaass* (first-hand believers), which was later used widely in different branches of Islamic Thought as a proof of superiority on others. Philosophers, *Mutakallimun* (theologians) and *Fuqaha* (jurists) all have claimed that they are *the hawaass*, they have the most conclusive knowledge of Allah and their way of understanding and living Islam is superior on others.
[41] *AIR*, 221-22.
[42] *AIR*, 222.
[43] *AIR*, 222.
[44] *AIR*, 223.

that "A must know what sorts of circumstances would render the putative 'experience of *x*' suspect and must also know that these circumstances do not in fact obtain."[45] Having elucidated a few points, Hick states that on the whole, when experiences are put to test within their tradition, they comply with the standards of truthfulness within that tradition or denomination. He furthermore gives two criteria. The first one is, quoting St Teresa of Avila, "conformity with the scriptures," which is true of Islam too.[46] The second one is what Hick calls "less-tradition specific," the fruit of their experience in their life. For that, he quotes Jesus' saying about "false prophets:" "You will be able to tell them by their fruits. Can people pick grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?" (Matthew 7:16). Hick rightly suggests that this moral criterion, the effect of an inner religious experience on the outer part of the life of the experiencer, is applied "more or less universally" throughout the great world religions.[47]

One can object to these criteria on the grounds that they were invented by human beings within different traditions in order to accept a religious experience as the "experience of the divine." Hick accepts this challenge readily and says that it is in fact true that these experiences might be interpreted differently from different standpoints, such as psychology and sociology, besides religion. Basing the argument on "the religious ambiguity of the universe," he nonetheless argues that "the acceptance of either" explanation "arises from a basic cognitive choice or act of faith. Once the choice has been made, and whilst it is operative, the alternative global view is reduced to a bare logical possibility."[48] This brings us to the title "the right to believe," as examined by Hick.

Before going any further it might be helpful to probe what James' essay is about, since the way it has been generally understood has been criticised recently by Ludwig F. Schlecht.[49] James at the beginning of his address defines it as "an essay in justification *of* faith, a defence of our right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters, in spite of the fact that our merely logical intellect may not have been coerced."[50] Schlecht, by picking on Hick, argues that "Hick -and countless others- have read James' essay as an attempt to justify belief in the existence of God as affirmed in traditional theism," which he thinks is wrong and far away from James' intent.[51] Two issues need to be dealt with here: one is whether Hick uses James' argument for the existence of the God of traditional theism and the other is Hick's criticism of James' argument as being an invitation to "wishful thinking."[52]

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[45] *AIR*, 223.
[46] This was and is a general principle in Islamic thought, especially in Sufism, where abnormalities occur: whatever one performs, even if one flies in the sky and walks freely on the river or sea, we should always look for the general principle which is that whether one and one's life is in line with the Qur'an and Sunnah; whether one is in *as-sirat al-mustaqim* (the true path).
[47] *AIR*, 224-25.
[48] *AIR*, 225-26.
[49] Schlecht, L F, *"Re-reading 'The Will to Believe,'"* Religious Studies 33, 1997, 217-225.
[50] James, *The Will*, 1-2.
[51] Schlecht, *"Re-reading,"* 217.
[52] *POR*, 56; *AIR*, 227.

We might perhaps start with the first point: that "Hick and countless others,"[53] use James' argument to affirm the existence of the God of traditional theism. This also could be examined from two angles: firstly, we should establish whether Hick really uses the argument in the alleged form, and secondly what kind of God or religion James is in favour of, if not the traditional conceptions from which Schlecht is trying to disassociate James wholeheartedly.

Methodologically, Schlecht's article lacks consistency in assessing Hick's position. This is because he bases his argument on the ideas found in Hick's *Philosophy of Religion,* an introductory book written in the early years of his career (1963, his second book). Even if one refers to a relatively updated imprint (1990), one cannot conclude on the basis of one book that, besides others, it voices the mature philosophy of the scholar in question. To be able to decide why Hick employs James' argument, one should perhaps go a little bit further and at least see his *Interpretation* so that one could have a comprehensive idea of on what grounds he uses it. Because of the context and the general assumption of what a philosophy of religion book is, I believe Schlecht assumes that Hick reads "James' essay as an attempt to justify the belief in the existence of" the God of traditional theism. However, it became apparent from the analysis given above, and as Hick's frequent warnings also evince, that since he wrote *Philosophy of Religion* many things have changed, including Hick's whole idea of God, never mind the traditionalist perspective. Therefore the claim that he utilises "The Will to Believe" in the affirmation of the theistic conception of God seems inadequate.

Schlecht presses this idea because he holds that James' understanding of God and of religion is rather different from conventional theologians', which brings us to the second sub-point and also happens to be the reason behind Schlecht's essay. Quoting another book by James, *A Pluralistic Universe,* Schlecht attests that James finds the dualistic approach in traditional theism unsatisfactory: "'The theistic conception, picturing God and his creation as *entities distinct* from each other, still leaves the human subject outside of the deepest reality in the Universe.' A pluralistic pantheism is there affirmed, a position distinct from both traditional theism and monistic pantheism (i.e. absolute idealism)."[54] Schlecht clarifies further James' understanding of religion:

> "In 'The Will to Believe' James offers us a 'very generic and broad' concept of religion; he is concerned to identify a common core to various types of religious expression -not the 'accidents' peculiar to any one religious position such as traditional theism. It is the affirmations of religion in this broadest sense that we have *a right to believe.*"[55]

One cannot but agree that this is the religion which Hick is arguing for in his now almost two decade old theory of religious pluralism: to establish "a common core to various types of religious expression."[56]

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[53] Unfortunately, Schlecht does not give any elucidation regarding the *others* whom has in mind.
[54] Schlecht, *"Re-reading,"* 218.
[55] Schlecht, *"Re-reading,"* 218 (My italics).
[56] Schlecht, *"Re-reading,"* 218.

As Schlecht furthers his investigation of James' understanding of religion, we discover that James explicitly rejects theism in "his later works" in favour of "pluralistic pantheism" as a more "intimate *Weltanschauung*." This is because "pantheism gives us a 'vision of God as the indwelling divine rather than the external creator, and of human life as part and parcel of that deep reality.' With such a view, rather than being wary and guarded, 'we may give way, embrace, and keep no ultimate fear.'"[57] Summarising James' argument, Schlecht concludes that three conditions should be met for a hypothesis, which is religion in our case, to be embraced:

> "1. We are presented with a 'genuine option' (i.e., live, forced and momentous).[58] 2. It is an issue that cannot be decided on 'intellectual grounds' (i.e., it cannot be settled with reference to objective evidence).[59] 3. The truth of the hypothesis is at least partially dependent upon the agent (i.e., it is a case where 'faith in a fact can help create the fact'[60])."[61]

By "taking our life in our hands,"[62] when we resolve that a "religious hypothesis" fulfils these conditions, Schlecht completes his exposition; "we have a 'right to believe,' to proceed 'at our own risk' in living in accordance with what religion proclaims and promises in its broadest sense. It is not a proclamation regarding an external creator, but rather regarding life that is 'worth living.'"[63] What is not clear in this paragraph is the connection between the two sentences or rather the mentality behind Schlecht's specific inference from the general definition in the first sentence.

To be able to demonstrate the problem more clearly we need to see two quotations from James: one is about our choices and the other is about his assessment of religion. James writes about the first one:

> "Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, 'Do not decide, but leave the question open,' is itself a passional decision, - just like deciding yes or no, - and is attended with the same risk."[64]

About religion:

> "Religion says essentially two things. First, she says that the best things are the more eternal things, the overlapping things, the things in the universe that throw the last stone, so to speak, and say the final word... The second affirmation of religion is that we are better off even now if we believe her first affirmation to be true."[65]

This may sound rather oversimplified, but for the sake of argument if we put the two together, we can hardly reach the same conclusion as Schlecht does. Some scholars also

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[57] Schlecht, "*Re-reading*," 222.
[58] James, *The Will*, 3.
[59] James, *The Will*, 3, 11.
[60] James, *The Will*, 25.
[61] Schlecht, "*Re-reading*," 224.
[62] James, *The Will*, 30.
[63] Schlecht, "*Re-reading*," 224-225.
[64] James, *The Will*, 11.
[65] James, *The Will*, 26.

disagree with what Schlecht suggests with regard to James' understanding of religion. Their argument is that "it is existing beliefs or propensities to believe which concern James above all in *The Will to Believe,*"[66] which in a way explains the reason behind his consideration of the Mahdi choice as dead in a Christian society.[67]

By overemphasising James' pantheistic tendencies, Schlecht, as I see it, weakens James' main argument about choices. If, faced with such a choice under such and such circumstances, I make a choice and accept a religion, it is up to neither James nor Schlecht to decide which proclamations of it I should and should not follow. For me, the crux of the matter lies not in James' pantheistic understandings of religion, but in his defence of and respect for human being's right to choice and to believe. To be able to reach a rather secular meaning of religion and, especially, of life, to merge the two seems forcing the boundaries too much and puts Schlecht in the same position as "Hick and countless others," which results in another misreading down the line. In other words, despite the apparent focus on personal relationship with the universe which anticipates the pantheistic claims in his later writings, James is not appealing to religion to make life more worthy of living, but simply saying that despite the lack of any compelling evidence one can opt for a different *Weltanschauung* which might have dramatic effects on one's worldly life as well as in the hereafter, if there will be one. This choice might be a theistic or a non-theistic religion, which does not make any difference in my reading of James, in terms of what can and cannot be followed, if we stick to the principle rightly and tightly. Thus even though Schlecht seemed to have achieved his aim by clarifying James' understanding of religion, his conclusion about limiting the application of a religious hypothesis to life or any other thing is far from being an agreeable one and in line with James'. This reductionist inference is, in fact, not very different from the alleged charge of distortion[68] against Hick and others of using James' thesis where it is not intended to be.

What of Hick's criticism of James as the authoriser of "wishful thinking?"[69] Hick summarises James' right *to believe* thesis as "our right to choose how to proceed within an ambiguous situation in which the choice is unavoidable and yet of momentous importance to ourselves."[70] Due to the religious neutrality of the universe, we can have no compelling argument in favour of either explanation, religious or naturalistic. Whichever way we choose to proceed, Hick argues, "we run an unavoidable risk." Hick goes on to say: "What is at stake is our relationship to reality. The possible gain is that of living in terms of reality and the possible loss is that of living in delusion."[71] As a solution, in these sorts of situations we follow, Hick quotes James, "our 'passional' or 'willing nature'," which Hick

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[66] Brown, H, *"The Retrieval of 'Liveness' in William James's Will to Believe,"* International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 42, 1997, 115. Brown also vehemently opposes to the suggestion that James has favoured pantheism over theism (99). See for more: 97-118.
[67] James, *The Will*, 6.
[68] Schlecht, *"Re-reading,"* 217.
[69] *AIR*, 227; *FK*, 44; *POR*, 56.
[70] *AIR*, 227.
[71] *AIR*, 227.

considers to be "wishful thinking" and naturally, "would authorise us to believe anything that we may have a strong enough propensity to believe, providing the evidence concerning it is inconclusive."[72] To prevent such undesirable results, James, as we presented above, introduces the *liveness* and *genuineness* of the option, which came under scrutiny from different points again. By "liveness," Hick understands that "it is widely held in the society around us."[73] Thus for different people different options might be alive: for a European, Christianity; for a Chinese, Confucianism; for an Arab, Islam; for a Jew, Judaism. But Hick finds "absurd" the supposition that "the truth varies geographically with the liveliness of the local options."[74] He takes James' argument to an extreme and suggests that if, as rational beings, we are persuaded and accept James' *The Will to Believe,* it should in fact make dead options alive. Therefore, by taking James' Mahdi example,[75] Hick concludes that it is not consistent for James to refuse the Mahdi's invitation or accept Christianity on the grounds that "our minds are more accustomed to one claim than to another."[76] For Hick, this is simply irrelevant. Rather, for a purely rational mind liberated from all restrictions of geographical and other constraints, both assertions are equally important in terms of credibility. Hence Hick considers "James' theory as open to refutation by a *reductio ad absurdum.*"[77]

James' *genuineness* condition and its application to a hypothesis is also attacked from the same angle on the grounds that the refusal of one option just because it is not initially attractive, or widely available, is unjustifiable. If that option, the Mahdi in James' example, offers the same expectations as, for instance, Christianity, James' proposition is to make "a leap of faith."[78]

The exposition cited above was Hick's earlier stance, written as far back as some forty years ago.[79] In his mature philosophy, however, rather than rejecting James' argument totally, he uses it with a slight change in the line of thought where he believes the

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[72] *AIR*, 227.
[73] *FK*, 43.
[74] *FK*, 43.
[75] James, *The Will*, 6. The Mahdi was supposed to have written "I am the Expected One whom God has created in his effulgence. You shall be infinitely happy if you confess me; otherwise you shall be cut off from the light of the sun. Weigh, then, your infinite gain if I am genuine against your finite sacrifice if I am not?" (Ibid.).
[76] *FK*, 43.
[77] *FK*, 43-44.
[78] Pojman, L P, *Religious Belief and the Will*, London and New York, RKP, 1986, p 82. It is also worth noting, Pojman states, that the "underlying" principle for James' pragmatist approach to belief is "a utilitarian assumption that we ought to satisfy in a manner that maximises happiness." That is only possible with adopting the optimistic view that "goodness will win over evil." Since there is no conclusive evidence towards this, "we have a right to believe in the enabling belief that good will win." (Pojman, *Religious Belief*, 82.) This may seem an unfriendly alliance but Hick's whole philosophy of religions does not seem to stand too far away from this utilitarian stance, especially from a naturalistic point of view, even though Hick claims that it is a *religious* interpretation of religion unlike others (*AIR*, 1-2). The reason for the resemblance is that if we accept his proposal to understand religions, we maximise our happiness, since it grants each of the great world religions the right to provide salvation to its followers. Therefore, it is good in maximising individuals' happiness and also good on the whole for the happiness of the world's population, because it would make more positive contributions to the world peace than its rivals owing to its basic premiss: that is there is no superior religion and all are equally true.
[79] *FK* was first published in 1957.

argument fails. He suggests that "... if we substitute compelling religious experience for the mere desire to believe an unproved and undisproved proposition, James' basic argument then becomes an argument for our right to trust our own religious experience and to be prompted by it to trust that of the great religious figures."[80] Therefore, Hick concludes, if, on the absence of compelling evidence, one experiences the world religiously, or takes part in a group which follows "this mode of experience," one is "rationally entitled to trust that experience and to proceed to believe and to live on the basis of it."[81]

Hick turns at this stage to the point made at the beginning of the section: the applicability of his argument to both theistic and non-theistic experiences and beliefs. He says: "it is evident that essentially the same argument could be formulated for non-theistic experience and belief. Thus those who report the advaitic experience of oneness with Brahman, ... are entitled to base their belief-systems on those forms of experience."[82]

A complication, however, arises if one accepts Hick's conclusion, that is to trust one's own experience of sense in the presence of God. If everybody has a right to trust his or her experience, this will surely lead us to maintain "an equal justification for acceptance of a number of mutually contradictory propositions," which in turn would threaten the validity of Hick's argument.[83] Hick here refers to Hume's criticism of miracles in *Enquiries* on the grounds that "in matters of religion, whatever is different is contrary; and that it is impossible the religions of ancient Rome, of Turkey, of Siam, and of China should, all of them, be established on any sound foundation."[84] Hick substitutes miracles in Hume's argument with religion and tries, in the following chapters, to solve the problem of plurality in the experience of God, which sometimes leads to the acceptance of contradictory truth-claims believed to flow from the same source.[85]

Can one be totally persuaded by Hick's argument? Not entirely. I shall try to explain why. In the past, people also had experiences of their own with different results such as the belief that the earth was flat and in the centre of the universe. They were no less sure of the truthfulness of their experiences than us. Nevertheless, as Hick also points out frequently, it turned out that they were wrong in their perception of the world. The question, then, arises: could it be that, despite all our technological advances in observing our environment, by which I mean the universe in a broader sense, our perception, specifically

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[80] *AIR*, 227-228.
[81] *AIR*, 228.
[82] *AIR*, 228.
[83] *AIR*, 228.
[84] Hume, D, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, P H Nidditch, ed. , Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992, sect. x, part 2, 121.
[85] When Hick criticises James' the right to believe argument in *Faith and Knowledge*, he starts with the idea that "this view of faith ... is not the view of the ordinary believer" (*FK*, 42). As a sporadic thought, it seems to me the same logic applies to Hume's argument. Many of the ordinary believers are not very much concerned with what others say or do. From their point of view, neither disproves either of them. So our problem here is rather more intellectual or philosophical than existential. Well, at least, this could be true for the holders of a Perennialist line, which argues the naturality of diversity while consistently declining to offer a satisfactory solution to the problem.

regarding the Real, after all proved wrong? Even though Hick might not agree with the distinction between perceptions of the material objects found in our surroundings in the world and of the Real, I would still like to stress the fact that there is a considerable difference between the two experiences. As happened in the past, if we had not had the chance of verifying our experiences concerning the material world, we would not have found out that Ptolemaic picture of the universe was in fact wrong. But in the case of religious experiences, there is no way of verifying the claims made by the religions concerning the Real. Hick would answer that it is a way of experiencing the universe or rather experience of it religiously. Hick maintains by the extension of Wittgenstein's *seeing-as concept* that all our experience is *experiencing-as*, whether it be a physical or a metaphysical one, such as table and God respectively.[86] He declares that "all experience embodies concept-laden forms of interpretation,"[87] which means that there could be no direct experience of anything in the universe.[88] What this means is that *whatever mode of knowing* we are given by birth, by society, by geography, etc., we experience and interpret the universe accordingly. If we may restate it in cybernetic terms *we interpret our surroundings as we are programmed.*[89] This is how Hick puts it with a quotation from St Thomas Aquinas: "things known are in the knower according to the mode of the knower."[90] Therefore if we have different modes of knowing, or are programmed differently, we may even perceive a table differently, in Hick's controversial example, let alone God. A table, Hick argues, could be conceived as differently by a quantum physicist, a lay person and, say, a Martian. Thus is God. Since we have to trust our experiences in our daily perceptions of the world, so long as they conform to the common perceptions held by many, we also have to trust our compelling religious experiences in the presence of God. Here lies the crux of the matter: despite the different perceptions of the table by a quantum physicist and a lay person, they would agree on putting their coffee cups on the table, which refers to the solidity of the object as we normally perceive it.[91] Unfortunately, this is not the case in perceptions about God or the universe. The claims made by the different religions concerning the religious character of the universe do not conform with one another. To this objection, Hick would provide two answers. One is that there is a cumulative case for religions to be true since they are universal, and therefore correspond to each other at a phenomenological level. To those who hold a naturalistic way of

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[86] *AIR*, 140-42.
[87] *AIR*, 142.
[88] Hick confirms this deduction in a tape, recorded during a discussion (*"Religious Pluralism and Kantian Metaphysics,"*) held in Lampeter University, Wales, U.K., in March 1997, between him and David Cockburn of Lampeter University, in front of a live audience.
[89] One wants to ask whether we are supposed to be programmed by the Real before we are born. Hick probably would respond that apart from the basic hardware, say mind or reason, we are born unprogrammed, with which many would agree.
[90] *AIR*, 153.
[91] When Hick was questioned about the appropriateness of this analogy in the Lampeter discussion, he agreed it is not a perfect example and suggested that we should leave the analogies behind, since they might one way or the other be misleading, and stick to the Kantian distinction of noumenon and phenomenon; in Hickian terms the Real in itself and as humanly experienced (*The Lampeter Recordings*).

understanding religions, the ostensible religiosity of the universe may mean two things: *in toto delusory* or a sub-step before the evolution of the human mind in becoming free from all superstitious ties (*atheism*). Then comes Hick's second reply that the universe is *religiously ambiguous,* i.e. could be interpreted both religiously and naturalistically. As a "religious interpretation of religion"[92], his hypothesis fits best with the data in hand in explaining pluralism.[93] Before examining which theory fits better with the plurality of religions, we can take a look at the phenomenon of religion, its development, what Hick means by religion and how widely he has engaged with it.

Before we commence to examine Hick's thought on alternative explanations about the apparent plurality witnessed in the experience of God, following Hick's line, we might look into the different streams of experiences, beliefs and traditions of God or the Real.

2.2.2. "The Directory of Gods"

The aim here is to try to explore what Hick understands by the term *religion* , how he employs it and in what sense and on what scope. What are the cornerstones of his understanding of religion?

Despite Hick's opposition to a definitive approach in examining religion that is derived from a certain definition of religion, to avoid confusion I shall first look at possibilities and give an approximate criterion to indicate what makes a tradition or system religious. While doing this, I would consider only religious definitions of religion rather than naturalistic ones, since my main concern in this chapter will be the religious understanding of religion. Even though Hick believes that religion "cannot be adequately defined but only described,"[94] he provides us with a definition of religion to exemplify this inadequateness. To him, "religion ... centres upon an awareness of and response to a reality that transcends ourselves and our world, whether the 'direction' of transcendence be beyond or within or both."[95] The key point for me in this definition is *the belief in some*

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[92] *AIR*, 1-2.

[93] Hick is not alone in basing the justification of religious belief on experiencing the world religiously, i.e. our right to believe in the light of compelling religious experience. In his extensive work on religious experience, *Perceiving God*, W P Alston defends almost the same position at a greater length. Right at the beginning of the book, he writes:

> "I want to make explicit at the outset that my project here is to be distinguished from anything properly called an 'argument from religious experience" for the existence of God. The thesis defended here is not that the existence of God provides the best explanation for facts about religious experience or that it is possible to *argue* in any way from the latter to the former. It is rather that people sometimes do perceive God and thereby acquire justified beliefs about God. In the same way, if one is a direct realist about sense perception, as I am, one will be inclined to hold not that internal facts about sense experience provide one with premises for an effective argument to the existence of external physical objects, but rather that in enjoying sense experience one thereby perceives external physical objects and comes to have various justified beliefs about them, without the necessity of exhibiting those beliefs (or their propositional contents) as the conclusion of any sort of argument" (Alston, W P, *Perceiving God: An Epistemology of Religious Experience*, Ithaca and London, Cornell UP, 1993, 3).

[94] *AIR*, 5.

[95] *AIR*, 3. On naturalistic definitions, he states that they consider religion "as a purely human activity or state of mind." There have been "phenomenological, psychological and sociological" definitions of religion from a naturalistic stance (Ibid.). Strangely enough, depending on this

sort of a Transcendent Being, whether conceived to be personal or impersonal or in some other way; it does not matter. What matters, in addition to other features such as rites and liturgy, is that a religion should accommodate the belief in the Transcendent. Hick also takes this as his primary "focus" in *An Interpretation of Religion*, but does not consider this as the essence of religion, since he does not believe that there can be one.[96] However, this, for me, is the dividing line, since I take "the belief in the Transcendent" to be the "essence of religion." Thus the amount of overlap with the values or practices of properly "religious traditions" at other levels will make a system *religious* only if it accommodates belief in the Transcendent. This is the line I follow throughout the chapter wherever I use the words religion, religious, etc. But I agree with Hick that not to have belief in the Transcendent does not rule out the possibility of salvation. Thus, as long as they meet the salvific criterion, the newer and primitive religions that do not have a concept of the Transcendent might also offer salvation.[97]

Following the phenomenology of religions, right at the beginning of *An Interpretation of Religion*, Hick identifies two concepts as the defining aspects of his view of religion. The first is "the virtual universality throughout human life of ideas and practices that are recognisably religious."[98] To bolster this view, he quotes Talcott Parsons' statement that modern anthropology has clearly established the validity of this premise,[99] which is described in Mircea Eliade's words as "the 'sacred' is an element in the structure of consciousness and not a stage in the history of consciousness."[100] Hick warns that this generalisation certainly does not entail the religiosity of every individual who has existed so far, but means that "all human societies have displayed some religious characteristics."[101] Following sociologists like Robert Bellah, Hick stretches the line so far as to include even systems of ideas like Marxism, Maoism and humanism, though they are seen as alternative ways of living to religion. Hick achieves this broad coverage with a concept adopted from Wittgenstein: "*'religion' as a family-resemblance concept:* referring to a network of partly overlapping and partly distinct phenomena."[102]

A "family-resemblance concept," or "cluster," as it is called, as Hick understands it, the idea that within the members of a family, "there are no characteristics that every member must have; but nevertheless there are characteristics distributed sporadically and in varying

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definition, Aslan suggests that Hick "proposes" this to be a "working definition of religion" (Aslan, A, *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, Surrey, UK: Curzon, 1998, 30). This to me is totally mistaken, since Hick neither accepts a definition of religion, nor proposes one, nor believes that there is an "essence of religion" (*AIR*, 5-6).

[96] *AIR*, 6.

[97] *AIR*, 307-308.

[98] *AIR*, 21.

[99] *AIR*, 21.

[100] *AIR*, 22 (cited from Eliade, M, *A History of Religious Ideas*, trans. Trask, W R, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978, vol. I, xiii).

[101] *AIR*, 21-22.

[102] *AIR*, 22 (my italics).

degrees which together distinguish this from a different family."[103] To elucidate this, Wittgenstein gives the instance of *games*. "Some are solitary, others competitive; some individual, others team activities; some depend on skill, others on chance," etc. Even though they share "no common essence," Wittgenstein argues, we consider them games because "each is similar in important respects to some others in the family, though not in all respects to any or in any respect to all." "Instead of a set of defining characteristics there is a network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing like the resemblances and differences in build, features, eye colour, gait, temperament and so on among the members of a natural family."[104] Hick argues that certain definitions of religion, either religious or naturalistic, lack the capacity to contain all traditions and all "embody decisions and either reveal or conceal commitments."[105]

To avoid the problems created with a certain definition, Hick opts for an umbrella term and adopts the Wittgensteinian family-resemblance position as a starting point for his philosophy of religions. The reason for this is that Hick holds that religion "cannot be adequately defined but only described."[106] But what is the "pointer" for something to be counted as "religion' in this broad sense? Hick turns to P Tillich at this stage to borrow his idea of "ultimate concern." It is the right indicator because, Hick suggests, "religious objects, practices and beliefs have a deep importance for those whom they count as religious:" "important in a more permanent and ultimate sense."[107] Thus Hick concludes that when we mention religion in a specific, narrower sense, we exclude Marxism and other secular faiths; but in case of the wider sense, we include them in the category, meaning probably as a way of living or human beings' response to their environment as a whole. Within this philosophy, the question whether Marxism is a religion "ceases to have a straightforwardly correct answer" for Hick; he tries rather to expose its relation to the complex phenomena of the family of religion.[108]

I concur with Hick that a certain definition would bring in difficulties, but to extend the definition thus far, and thereby to accommodate the *secular faiths*, is something which I would disagree with. Even if we employ a Wittgensteinian *family-resemblance argument*, it seems to me inappropriate, as N Smart also points out, to include them in this category and try to call them "religions or even 'quasi-religions,'" since the very essence of these ideologies is in many respects "antireligious" and of course those who believe in and live by these philosophies would not wish to be put in the category of religion, or anything closer to that.[109] However, even Smart seems to share Hick's understanding, or vice versa, when he states, by way of underpinning the logic of categorisation, that "the various

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[103] *AIR*, 3-4.
[104] *AIR*, 4.
[105] *AIR*, 3.
[106] *AIR*, 5.
[107] *AIR*, 4.
[108] *AIR*, 5.
[109] Smart, N, *The World's Religion: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1993, 25.

systems of ideas and practices, whether religious or not, are competitors and mutual blenders, and can thus be said to play in the same league. *They all help to express the various ways in which human beings conceive of themselves, and act in the world.*"[110] One can appreciate the similarities, but the analogy, in my opinion, is still false. Similarities at one level do not justify the categorising at a wider level. The family-resemblance concept could be a useful tool to capture the broad range of religious experiences found across the globe, if we insist on "the ultimate concern" about the belief in the Transcendent as the indicator of a religion. Therefore, ideologies such as Marxism and humanism cannot be counted as religions in the proper sense since they lack the core of religion, i.e. belief in the Transcendent. I believe that considering them religions sounds like "God/the Real bless atheism."

Furthermore, it seems to me that Hick's argument about *the religious ambiguity of the universe* can be extended by implication to experience as well as interpretation of the universe. That is, it could be both experienced and interpreted either religiously or naturalistically. Now if a Marxist or a humanist experiences the universe irreligiously, that is living a good life without attaching to it any transcendental influence, there is no point in trying to put her or him under such a category however wide it is. In other words, we should accept the self-description of an ideology. To me, whichever way we look at it, their "ultimate concern" is very different from that of mainstream religions' followers. Both might share the problems of the world and "work against exploitation, against racism, against poverty and starvation," and "for the creation of justice and peace on earth,"[111] but the partnership in these issues does not mean going one step further to make them partners as religions. To me the term religion is not wide enough to accommodate ideologies like Marxism and humanism due to its affiliation with an idea of the transcendent. If we want to have a broader term to include both types of system, religious and antireligious, as Hick tries to, I propose it would be something like the German word, *Weltanschauung*, meaning philosophy of life, or world-view.[112]

To me, one question still remains unanswered: does Hick use this family-resemblance concept to overcome difficulties brought about by a certain definition, a mere intellectual philosophising activity, or to establish a wider framework for his *philosophy of religions?* In my opinion the latter is true even if he ends up ascribing salvific values to Marxism and humanism.

One further problem arises if we take Hick's position seriously, i.e. admit that secular faiths could also offer salvation. Does this mean he accepts that one could achieve salvation outside religion? Apparently, it does. He negates D Forrester's early charge that

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[110] Smart, *The World's Religions*, 25 (my italics).
[111] *ROF*, 80.
[112] One might suggest *faith systems* opting for faith instead of religion by taking W C Smith's line. But it still implies an idea of a transcendent and a response to it, and therefore seems inadequate for our purpose (Hughes, E J, *Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Theology for the World*, London: SCM Press: 1986, 7-8).

his theory denotes "that there is no salvation outside religion."[113] He claims that, as some inclusivists do in case of Christianity, Marxists and humanists are unconsciously responding to the Real, when they participate in efforts for a "better human future" and "are undergoing the salvific transformation."[114] What is the difference then between the secular religions and the traditional ones? During my meeting with him in Birmingham, I put this question to him. He replied that "their upper structure is wrong," meaning that they are mistaken by denying the existence of an Ultimate Reality. A critic might still feel that for someone who set out to establish a better theory explaining the religious phenomena than, at least, the naturalistic ones, this is a rather untenable position. Is Hick not "wishfully" ascribing religious meaning to a merely human activity? Why do we need to call the system religious anyway or, to put it another way, why do we need to stay within the boundaries of religion at all?[115]

The second concept Hick draws our attention to about the religious character of the universe is the differentiation between pre-axial and post-axial religions, which he reckons is a "widely accepted large-scale interpretive concept." The distinction states that pre-axial religion is "centrally (but not solely) concerned with the preservation of cosmic and social order" and post-axial religion is "centrally (but not solely) concerned with the quest for salvation or liberation."[116] Hick, following historians of religion such as Mircea Eliade and Karl Jaspers, defines pre-axial religions as "archaic," meaning literally "the earliest times."[117] Elsewhere, Hick gives more explanation of what he means, or rather what he does not mean, by archaic. He stresses the fact that "no religious stigma should be attached to" it. "It is not implied that it is better, from a religious point of view, to be literate than pre-literate, or to live within a contemporary rather than a now extinct form of life." Despite the benefits brought about by the "axial age," we also, Hick argues, suffered losses, such as the maintenance of ecological equilibrium and an awareness of "the moral reality of community," which we could "re-learn from the continuing precarious threads of primal religion in the modern world."[118] It is still not clear to my mind whether Hick is being consistent with his claim that he is not grading religions when he labels the pre-axial religion *archaic*. Surely, he does not consider them salvific in the sense that they do not offer a "radical human transformation," due to their focus on "keeping the communal life on an even keel both in itself and in relation to the sacred."[119] Hick regards them as

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[113] Forrester, D, *"Professor Hick and the Universe of Faiths,"* Scottish Journal of Theology 29, no. 1, 1976, 70.
[114] *ROF*, 80-81.
[115] The discussion has implications on the relationship between moral/ethical and religious. Hick agrees with the conclusion that one does not need to be religious to be ethical, which is the humanists' case. Nevertheless, his stress on the concept of a loving, compassionate God/the Real, who ultimately wills the salvation of all human beings, forces him to include secular systems in his philosophy of religions and to give them salvific meaning.
[116] *AIR*, 22.
[117] *AIR*, 23.
[118] *AIR*, 28-29.
[119] *ROF*, 109; *AIR*, 23.

"communal rather than individual responses to the Real."[120] Two questions come to mind: firstly, since communal salvation or peace is also emphasised in the majority of the great world religions, why not widen the scope of salvation to contain both types of responses to the Real? Secondly, if we want to remain objective in our evaluation of religions, we should not make value judgements about communal and individual responses to the Real. It appears to me that Hick's philosophy implies this value judgement when he indirectly favours individual response to the Real against the communal one.

The term *pre-axial* contains "both the 'primal,' 'pre-literate,' or 'primitive' religions of stone-age humanity and the now extinct priestly and often national religions of the ancient Near East and Egypt, Greece and Rome, India and China."[121] This chronological classification of religion as *pre* and *post-axial periods* does not necessarily suggest the elimination of the first and a succession of it by the second. In fact "earlier forms of religion generally continue to some extent both alongside and also within the later ones." It, therefore, "refers primarily to origins."[122]

Pre-axial religion offers "both psychological and sociological" comfort to its adherents. Hick observes:

> "Psychologically it is an attempt to make stable sense of life, and particularly of the basic realities of subsistence and propagation and the final boundaries of birth and death, within a meaning-bestowing framework of myth. This serves the social functions of preserving the unity of the tribe of people within a common world-view and at the same time of validating the community's claims upon the loyalty of its members. The underlying concern is conservative, a defence against chaos, meaninglessness and the breakdown of social cohesion. Religious activity is concerned to keep fragile human life on an even keel; but it is not concerned, as is post-axial religion, with its radical transformation."[123]

Hick notes that the main difference between pre and post-axial religions is *the absence of hope* for a "radically new, different and better existence, whether in this life or in a further life to come,"[124] in the pre-axial religion. For them, "even the high God was creator and preserver but not saviour or liberator."[125] Religion has functioned "to prolong the existing" *status quo* rather than to point to any "basic transformation of the human situation."[126] Thus he concludes that there was no eschatology in the pre-axial religion.

As someone coming from a tradition which by default declares the universality of Allah's prophetic revelation to all humankind,[127] Hick's conclusion about the pre-axial religion being indifferent towards human transformation seems to me inadequate. Islam attests that the umbrella of religion revealed by Allah in different periods includes several

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[120] *ROF*, 109.
[121] *AIR*, 23.
[122] *AIR*, 23.
[123] *AIR*, 23.
[124] *AIR*, 28.
[125] *AIR*, 28.
[126] *AIR*, 28.
[127] *The Qur'an*, 10:47; 16:36; 17:15; 35:24.

traditions differing from each other in practical principles (that is *shari'a* in al-Maturidi's understanding), but not in terms of transforming faith (*islam* in the wider sense). In that sense there is no difference between the religion preached by Adam, Noah, Jesus and Muhammad. All were proclaiming the same faith. Thus, as I see it, Islam would support an evolutionary development of religion in terms of rites, communal relations, etc., but not in terms of faith, i.e. the pre-axial religion was as much transformative as post-axial religions.[128] One might rightly ask what evidence Islam has to corroborate this claim. Not much, in fact, apart from its resemblances to Judeo-Christian traditions; this is more of a dogmatic principle rather than a scientific or a philosophical one.[129] One can still question the validity of so-called scientific findings, whether they be historical, anthropological or phenomenological about the primal/pre-axial religions. Compared to the whole history of human existence in the world, what we know of the primal religions may be insufficient to make justifiable judgements about the whole character of an era. I am rather sceptical of this sort of sweeping generalisation. For me the mystery still continues, a dilemma where religious dogma might offer some help.[130]

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[128] Thus the idea of a Supreme Being can be found among many of the primal religions. John S Mbiti, who conducted a study covering "nearly 300 peoples from all over Africa outside traditionally Christian and Muslim communities, suggests that "in all these societies, without a single exception, people have a notion of God as the Supreme Being" (*African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Heinemann, 1977, 16, 27-38, see also his: *Concepts of God in Africa*, London: SPCK, and New York: Praeger, 1969). Other studies on African religions support Mbiti's findings, though not as strong as he puts it. See: Parrinder, G, *African Traditional Religion*, London: SPCK, 1968, 32-33; Smart, *The World's Religions*, 300; Ray, B C, "*African Religions*," in The Encyclopedia of Religion, ed. M Eliade, London and New York: Macmillan, 1987, v. 1, 63; Ranger, T O, "*African Traditional Religion*," in The World's Religions, ed. S Sutherland, et al., London: Routledge, 1988, 868-869; Shorter, A, "*African Religions*," in A New Handbook of Living Religions, ed. J R Hinnells, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, 565. A similar pattern can be detected in other primal religions as well, even if it may not be very clearly identified, expressed or universally recognised. See for instance: Walls, A, "*Primal Religious Traditions in Today's World*," in Religion in Today's World, ed. F Whaling, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987, 254-255; Brotherston, G, "*Latin American Traditional Religion: Three Orders of Service*," in The World's Religions, 899, 904; Turner, H W, "*New Religious Movements in Primal Societies*," in A New Handbook of Living Religions, 585; Smart, *The World's Religions*, 106, 165, 227.

[129] For a treatment of the universality of revelation within the great world religions -Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, see: Ayoub, M, "*The Word of God and the Voices of Humanity*," in The Experience of Religious Diversity, ed. J Hick and H Askari, Hants, England and Brookfield, Vermont: Gower Publishing: 1985, 53-65.

[130] One can disagree with Hick's conclusion when he differentiates between pre and post-axial religions, claiming that while the former aims at "keeping the communal life on an even keel both in itself and in relation to the sacred" (*ROF*, 109; *AIR*, 23), the latter centres on human transformation. Keeping in mind the role of religion in shaping society, this argument might work against Hick or one see that this is not such a neat distinction after all. In many cases, post-axial religion has served and still serves as much as or sometimes more than the pre-axial religions in "keeping the communal life on an even keel." One can list their resistance to change and ex-communicating and heresizing the advocates of change, etc. Thus, as A MacIntyre says, "it buttresses the established order by sanctifying it and by suggesting that the political order is somehow ordained by divine authority (p. 80) and "remains irremediably tied to a social content it ought to disown" (p. 88). The charges levelled against pre-axial religion, chiefly *the absence of hope* for a "radically new, different and better existence, whether in this life or in a further life to come" (*AIR*, 28), by Hick is almost directed against Christianity in favour of Marxism as the champion of hope in this earthly world. MacIntyre concludes: "Marxism as historically embodied phenomenon may have been deformed in a large variety of ways. But the Marxist project remains the only one we have for re-establishing *hope as a social virtue*" (p. 88). Even though this essay was written long before the collapse of Soviet and Eastern European Block Communism, I think many of the

So much for pre-axial religion. It is time now to turn to post-axial religion, which is central for Hick's philosophy of religions. Hick explores the axial age briefly, as the period that witnessed the emergence of great religious leaders and has paved the way for the great world religions (which is what Hick is essentially concerned with). He mentions for instance, as the significant leaders of the axial age, Confucius and Lao Tzu (Confucianism and Taoism), Buddha and Mahavira (Buddhism and Jainism), Zoroaster (Zoroastrianism), the Hebrew prophets -Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, the Isaiahs, Ezekiel, and the Greek philosophers Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The axial period thus marks the wane of the "tribal and national religions" and the beginning of "the world religions."[131] Hick comments that "in this period all the major religious options, constituting the major possible ways of conceiving the ultimate, were identified and established and that nothing of comparably novel significance has happened in the religious life of humanity since."[132] In this period also, the "human mind began to stand back from its encompassing environment to become conscious of itself as distinct reality with its own possibilities." Therefore the religions which emerged in the following period or post-axial age all have a "clear soteriological pattern," which is the transformation of human beings from self-centredness to Reality-centredness. By *the religions*, Hick has in mind "the Indian religions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism" (Sikhism) and "the Semitic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as "their modern secular offspring, Marxism"[133] and humanism.

Despite the previous list, however, in a later work, *The Rainbow of Faiths,* Hick states that he is primarily concerned with "the great world religions,"[134] with Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.[135] This does not suggest that other smaller and newer religions, "primal religion[s]," and "the great secular faiths of humanism and Marxism," are trivial; Hick's only excuse is that "time is limited." Another advantage of engaging with the great world religions is the widely accumulated knowledge about them throughout the centuries, which forms a useful background for the discussion.[136] But Hick still ascribes some sort of salvific value for those faiths remaining outside his immediate circle including Marxism and humanism.[137]

As explained in the closing lines of the previous section, every individual is rationally entitled to hold religious beliefs and to participate in a tradition in the light of his or her

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exponents of Marxism still believe this to be the case. Therefore, Hick's position on the roles of pre and post-axial religions seem to be a vague and untenable one. For more on post-axial religions and worldviews, see MacIntyre, *Marxism and Christianity*, Middlesex, Pelican/Penguin Books, 1971, especially chapter 7.

[131] *AIR*, 30.
[132] *AIR*, 31.
[133] *AIR*, 32.
[134] *ROF*, 11.
[135] *ROF*, 11.
[136] *ROF*, 11-12.
[137] *ROF*, 80-81; 110-111.

compelling experience compatible with or supported by one of the great world traditions. This is "an affirmation about the nature of reality."[138] One is "thus making genuine assertions" and is "making them on appropriate and acceptable grounds."[139] Hick also agrees with the findings of the history of religions about the evolution of religion when he remarks that religious experience could be "developed, corrected and enlarged in the course of future experience."[140]

We can now glance at the variety of god or goddesses which exist within these great world traditions. This will take the form of a report of gods and goddess known thus far, "often with different characteristics," discovered by the history of religions. Hick's list is as follows for both the theistic and non-theistic range:

> "A collection of Mesopotamian gods made by A. Deinel in 1914 contains 3300 entries... In Hesiod's time there were said to be 30 000 deities. And if one could list all the past and present gods and goddesses of India, such as Agni, Vayu, Suray, Aryaman, Aditi, Mitra, Indra, Varuan, Brahma, Vishnu, Lakshmi, Shiva, Kali, Ganesh... and of the Near East, such as Osiris, Isis, Horus, Re, Yahweh, Baal, Moloch, An, Enlil, Ea, Tiamat, Enki, Marduk... and of southern Europe, such as Zeus, Kronos, Hera, Apollo, Dionysus, Hephaestus, Poseidon, Aphrodite, Hermes, Mars, Athena, Pan... and of northern Europe, such as, Thor, Balder, Vali, Freyr, Frigg, Woden, Rheda, Erce, Donar, Fosite... and of Africa, such as Nabongo, Luhanga, Ngai, Nyama, Amaomee, Lesa, Ruhanga, Kolo, Naymbe, Imana, Kimbumba, Molimo, Ohe... and also of the Americas, Australasia, northern Asia and the rest of the world they would probably form a list as bulky as the telephone directory of a large city... Brahman, the Dharmakaya, Nirvana, Sunyata, the Tao..."[141]

Having set the limits and the scope of Hick's search, we may approach various hypothetical solutions accounting for this plurality of experiences of the Real, and the critique of them offered by Hick.

2.3. The Interpretations

As seen in the previous section, it is clear that there is a plurality in the experience and in the expression of that experience of the Real. There are several general interpretations to explain this plurality. At the outset of *An Interpretation*, Hick classifies these on the one hand "naturalistic, treating religion as a purely human phenomenon," and on the other "religious," "developed within the confines of a particular confessional conviction which construes all other traditions in its own terms."[142] The latter has also been named "confessional" and "particularistic." Hick sets out his task as to develop a theory that is

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[138] *AIR*, 233.
[139] *AIR*, 233.
[140] *AIR*, 233. I wonder whether Hick also agrees with Hume's claim about the gradual development of religions from polytheism to theism. For more information see: Hume, D, *The Natural History of Religion*, H. E. Root, ed., London, Adam & Charles Black, 1956.
[141] *AIR*, 233-34.
[142] *AIR*, 1.

"religious but not confessional" and interprets "religion in its plurality of forms."[143] Before moving on to Hick's theory, I shall now look briefly at these alternative explanations, namely naturalistic and particularistic theories of religion, following Hick's account.

2.3.1. Naturalistic Theories

Hick mentions two types of naturalistic explanation: one is negative and the other is positive in terms of overall attitude to religion. The negative one upholds the irrelevance of religious explanation of the universe because of the very fact that we can have a meaningful explanation for "all the phenomena known to us, including religion itself."[144] The positive one, however, stretches the boundaries beyond the negative interpretation, suggesting that "there is an aspect of the universe that is actually incompatible with a theistic, or a religious, world-view."[145]

The negative arguments are deduced from the ultimate unknowns in a theory. Many phenomena as we know them could be explained naturalistically without leaning on a "transcendent divine Reality." Among them, in Hick's account, are "the evolution of the universe as a whole and of our ethical, cognitive, aesthetic and religious modes of experience."[146] The problem, however, the arguments face is to explain "the *existence* of the universe," why there is something rather than nothing at all, why we are here. Surely, these are the puzzling questions which human beings have been wrestling with since the beginning of recorded history. The answer to these questions is that we should simply accept the existence of the universe "as the ultimate inexplicable fact." This is not very different, they argue, from the religious case owing to the fact that it also has an "ultimate inexplicable fact in the form of God or a non-personal absolute." Instead of going one step further to more slippery ground by ascribing an "invisible mystery" to God, they conclude, "the sceptical mind prefers to rest in the mystery of the visible world."[147]

Hick then starts to deal with the second option, the positive approach. He particularly intensifies his effort on the Freudian psychological analysis and the Durkheimian sociological analysis of religion, respectively. Both in effect claim that "the gods and absolutes are creations of the human mind, projected to reflect back a comforting warmth amidst the harsh pressures and perils of life."[148]

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), the father of psychoanalysis, proposed two theories regarding the origins of religion: one is about its origin in the individual, while the other is related to the historical level.[149] On the individual level, Freud examines religion in *The Future of an Illusion,* where he regards "religious belief as "illusions, fulfillments of the

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[143] *AIR*, 1.
[144] *AIR*, 111.
[145] *AIR*, 111.
[146] *AIR*, 111.
[147] *AIR*, 111.
[148] *AIR*, 111-112.
[149] Even though Hick has dealt with the Freudian theory earlier in his career in *the Philosophy of Religion*, Chp. 3, there he does not make such a distinction. Rather, he summarises the theory as a whole.

oldest, strongest and the most urgent wishes of mankind.'"[150] In this sense religious belief works as a defence mechanism against the destructive aspects of nature- "disease and earthquake, storm and flood, and death itself."[151] By personalising these powers, religious persons aim at taming the threatening aspects of nature. Hick quotes Freud:

> "Impersonal forces and destinies cannot be approached; they remain eternally remote. But if the elements have passions that rage as they do in our own souls, if death itself is not something spontaneous but the violent act of an evil Will, if everywhere in nature there are Beings around us of a kind that we know in our society, then we can breathe freely, can feel at home in the uncanny and can deal by psychical means with our senseless anxiety. We are still defenceless, perhaps, but we are no longer helplessly paralysed; we can at least react. Perhaps, indeed, we are not even defenceless. We can apply the same methods against these violent supermen outside that we employ in our own society; we can try to adjure them, to appease them, to bribe them, and by so influencing them, we may rob them of a part of their power."[152]

To illustrate his point, Freud examines the doctrine of God the Father in Christianity and claims that it is nothing other than the exalted "earthly father as the ultimate benign power and authority in our lives."[153]

Freud developed his historical theory in *Totem and Taboo*[154] and *Moses and Monotheism*.[155] In both, the famous Oedipus complex[156] has an important role to play in explaining "the tremendous emotional intensity of man's religious life and the associated feelings of guilt and of obligation to obey the behests of the deity."[157] There, he based his theory on a supposedly pre-historic society where "the 'primal horde'" was consisted of "a male and with a number of females and their offspring."[158] "The father, as the dominant male, retained to himself exclusive rights over the females and drove away or killed any of the sons who challenged his position."[159] In order to gain the right to lead, the sons decided to murder their father and, as cannibals, eat him afterwards. Totemism, morality and the

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[150] *AIR*, 112, (quoted from *The Future of an Illusion*, 1961, 30).
[151] *AIR*, 112, (quoted from *The Future of an Illusion*, 1961, 30).
[152] *AIR*, 112, (cited from *The Future of an Illusion*, 16-17)
[153] *AIR*, 112.
[154] Freud, S, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. Strachey, J, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960.
[155] Freud, S, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Strachey, J, London: Hogarth Press and New York: Liveright Corp., 1939.
[156] Oedipus Rex is a character in Sophocles' play in Greek mythology. We learnt gradually from the play that he is the son of Laius, who was the king, and Jocasta, whom he is married after his father's death. The Freudian psychoanalysis of this figure, as a child's complex feelings towards his parents, love and hatred, has been criticised on the grounds that it is "a one-sided and too simple an account of the complex interactions in a family." Unlike the Freudian projection of the son as "the transgressor," the legend suggests that the father, having been told by an oracle that he would be killed by his own son, wanted his wife Jocasta "to destroy him (Oedipus) at birth." She, however, deserted him instead of killing. The father later initiated "the quarrel," which resulted in his death. In Shakespeare's play Hamlet, apparently regarded by psychoanalysts "similar to that of Oedipus, the stepfather, not the son, is the aggressor." (Gregory, R L and O L Zangwill, eds., *The Oxford Companion to Mind*, Oxford and New York, OUP, 570).
[157] *POR*, 35.
[158] *AIR*, 112; *POR*, 35.
[159] *POR*, 35.

religion, according to Freud, originated from this "primal patricide". However, the removal of the father did not prove to be an easy solution for the problem. For one thing, the sons were all in mourning and secondly, they could not all succeed to their father's position, which meant a "continuing need for restraint."[160] Thus "the dead father's prohibition took on the inner authority of a taboo." The sense of enmity, together with "the guilt of Oedipus complex," led to the sense of reverence and remorse towards the heavenly Father of Christianity, which, in turn, causes the acceptance of "authority of God" and submission to it.[161]

At this point, Hick starts his critique of Freudian theory of religion, which, he thinks, is nothing "other than a Freudian myth," since, to start with, "'the primal horde' hypothesis" cannot be substantiated anthropologically, i.e. anthropologists generally repudiate the validity of the theory.[162] Secondly, the Oedipus complex only accounts, if at all, for the male side of the story within the limits of the theistic religions,[163] excluding non-theistic traditions. Thus, even if one considers it valid, it amounts at best to a "theory about the origin of the religion in males," which illustrates "a limited part of the total religious spectrum." Therefore it cannot be held as a "theory of religion as such." Nevertheless, the theory sheds important light upon religion, especially about the effect of parents, particularly of the father, in the formation of deity in Semitic religions, and in its consideration of religion as a "psychological crutch," on which we rest upon and derive strength from when we face difficulties, stresses and grief in life . In these areas, Freud's argument has a great deal of validity. However, it would be a great mistake, Hick warns us, to count religious claims about "the nature of the universe" as false, since they operate as psychological crutches. Just because they come as "good news does not entail" that they are not true. Another important point to be noted is that "religion does not always offer consolation. It also offers challenge." The Holy scriptures of Semitic religions provide this sort of challenging test quite often. To quote but a few, Hick mentions Psalm 37:39,

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[160] *POR*, 35.
[161] *AIR*, 113; *POR*, 35.
[162] *AIR*, 113; *POR*, 35.
[163] It is said that Freud was not concerned with "religion or God in women." Due to his starting point with the male dominant "the primal horde," he must have believed, Hick suggests, that "religion is a male creation culturally imposed upon women" (*AIR*, 124).

Malachai 3:2 and Hebrews 4: 12.[164] I can also cite several verses from the Qur'an such as 2:214,[165] 2:257[166] and 29:1-3.[167]

There is one more point I should touch upon, before moving to sociological theory, where Hick agrees with the Freudian line of thinking. Drawing on his presuppositions, or rather on the suppositions of historians of religions, about the character of primal religions which lack eschatological beliefs, Hick admits that the belief in an after-life might be "a wish-fulfilment theory," in other words a mere creation of human mind. Hick notes that even though "wish-fulfilment" has not played any role at the beginning of life after death, it certainly had a part to play in later developments as we now know them. Hick also refers to early conceptions of the hereafter. For example, there was no hope of social justice, or the "reversal of fortunes" in the hereafter. Kings were thought to be kings in the hereafter, while the underprivileged servants and slaves were supposed to be still in the same position. "The idea of a *moral* judgement" as we conceive of it today, Hick argues, came into existence quite late, "perhaps first in the highly sophisticated civilisation of ancient Egypt"[168]

It is impossible not to disagree with Hick on this point. This is a sign of his naïve realism. When he is confronted with serious doctrines like life after death, as expected from his realism, instead of accepting it in the light of scriptures, he rather chooses to loosen it up in a very specific way which carries in it significant Indian elements that inevitably gives us a quite agnostic understanding of the afterlife. When I met him in Birmingham in November 1997, I asked him about the interpretation of dogmas such as life after death. Do we interpret it, if we can, or drop it altogether? As I predicted, he did not give me a clear answer. Rather, he said there might be several lives after this one, but we cannot speculate about its defining circumstances like how, when, where and so forth. It is clear that since he wrote *Death and Eternal Life,* Hick has changed his views on this issue too to adjust it to his pluralistic hypothesis, to be able to accommodate both theistic and non-theistic religions' claim on the matter. Elsewhere, he evidences this shift.[169] On these disputed issues, he rather favours now the Buddha's doctrine of the "undetermined questions." The implication is that trying to settle these questions now will not contribute to the salvations

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[164] "God is not only 'our strength in time of trouble' (*Psalm* 37:39) but also "like a refiner's fire' (*Malachai* 3:2), and 'the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart' (*Hebrews* 4:12)" (*AIR*, 113).

[165] "Or think ye that ye will enter Paradise while yet there has not come unto you the like of (that which came to) those who passed away before you? Affliction and adversity befell them, they were shaken as with earthquake, till the messenger (of Allah) and those who believed along with him said: When comes Allah's help? Now surely Allah's help is nigh.

[166] "Allah is the Protecting Friend of those who believe. He brings them out of darkness into light. As for those who disbelieve, their patrons are false deities. They bring them out of light into darkness. Such are rightful owners of the Fire. They will abide therein."

[167] "Alif. Lam. Mim. Do men imagine that they will be left (at ease) because they say, We believe, and will not be tested with affliction? Lo! We tested those who were before you. thus Allah knows those who are sincere, and knows those who feign."

[168] *AIR*, 113-14.

[169] *ROF*, 72.

of human beings. Thus we leave them for the time being and get on with our lives in order to achieve salvation/liberation, i.e. transformation from self-centredness to Reality-centredness.[170]

This also gives us another clue about Hick's evaluation of scripture and revelation, in which he puts too much emphasis on the human side of the scale. I, however, think that this is wrong. One would expect Hick's realism to leave these sorts of conflicting claims as they are in a tradition rather than siding with the Freudian claim which he elsewhere repudiates. This way we would have probably had a more balanced evaluation of the whole picture of afterlife within different traditions. What I am suggesting is that instead of adding new speculations to the existing phenomena, it would have been far less speculative if Hick had remained silent and left it as it was, which would have resulted in a fairer religious interpretation of religion.

On the whole, Hick believes, "the existing reductionist psychological theories of religion are by no means compelling in their own right." They imply prior naturalistic commitments. Thus for those who accept these convictions they might seem "plausible," but for those who do not they cease to be plausible.[171]

The French, Jewish sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858-1917)[172], took a positivist attitude towards religion. He started off with totemism "as it still existed in Australian aboriginal societies at the end of nineteenth century."[173] However, he claimed that his conclusions were universal and hence, "applicable to every sort of society indifferently, and consequently to every sort of religion."[174] Basically it was the society in which we live that was shaping us and reasserting itself through religion. The theory argues that "the gods whom men worship are imaginary beings unconsciously fabricated by society as instruments whereby it exercises control over the thoughts and behaviour of the individual."[175] Durkheim writes: "So if it is at once the symbol of the god and of society, is that not because the god and the society are only one?... The god of the clan, the totemic principle, can therefore be nothing else than the clan itself, personified and represented to the imagination under the visible form of the animal or vegetable which serves as totem."[176] Therefore, Hick cites Durkheim:

> "the believer is not deceived when he believes in the existence of a moral power upon which he depends and from which he receives all that is best in himself: this power exists, it is

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[170] *AIR*, 343-346; *DQ*, 105-118.
[171] *AIR*, 114.
[172] Durkheim's definition of religion: "*A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden -beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.* The second element which thus finds a place in our definition is no less essential than the first; for by showing that the idea of religion is inseparable from that of the Church, it makes it clear that religion should be an eminently collective thing." (Durkheim, E, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. J W Swain, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1976, 47).
[173] *AIR*, 115.
[174] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*, 214, 415-416.
[175] *POR*, 31-32.
[176] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*, 206.

society. When the Australian is carried outside himself and feels a new life flowing within him whose intensity surprises him, he is not the dupe of an illusion; this exaltation is real and is really the effect of forces outside of and superior to the individual. It is true that he is wrong in thinking that this increase of vitality is the work of a power in the form of some animal or plant. But this error is merely in regard to the letter of the symbol by which this being is represented to the mind and the external appearance which the imagination has given it, and not in regard to the fact of its existence. Behind these figures and metaphors, be they gross or refined, there is a concrete and living reality... Before all, [religion] is a system of ideas with which the individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members, and the obscure but intimate relations which they have with it."[177]

Regarding the relationship between the conception of god and society and how individuals relate themselves to them, Durkheim states:

> In a general way it is unquestionable that a society has all that is necessary to arouse the sensation of the divine in minds, merely by the power that it has over them; for to its members it is what a god is to his worshippers. In fact, a god is, first of all, a being whom men think of as superior to themselves, and upon whom they feel that they depend. Whether it be a conscious personality, such as Zeus or Jahweh, or merely abstract forces such as those in play in totemism, the worshiper, in the one case as in the other, believes himself held to certain manners of acting which are imposed upon him by the nature of the sacred principle with which he feels that he is in communion. Now society also gives us the sensation of a perpetual dependence. Since it has a nature which is peculiar to itself and different from our individual nature, it pursues ends which are likewise special to it; but as it cannot attain them except through our intermediacy, it imperiously demands our aid. It requires that, forgetful of our own interests, we make ourselves its servitors, and it submits us to every sort of inconvenience, privation and sacrifice, without which social life would be impossible. It is because of this that at every instant we are obliged to submit ourselves to rules of conduct and of thought which we have neither made nor desired, and which are sometimes even contrary to our most fundamental inclinations and instincts."[178]

Durkheim, on the negative side of the argument, holds "the naturalistic conviction that religion cannot be, as religious persons suppose, their response to a transcendent divine reality,"[179] but acknowledges, on the positive side, "its social power" and thus propounds that "the divine is a mythic symbolisation of the undoubted reality of the society of which the believer is a member."[180] In other words, "the god is only a figurative expression of the society."[181]

Starting from the positive remarks of Durkheim's study, Hick admits the fact that human beings are social animals and society, certainly, has effects on us. By casting

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[177] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*, 225.
[178] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*, 206-207.
[179] *AIR*, 116-117.
[180] *AIR*, 117.
[181] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*, 226.

important light on the development of pre-axial religions, it may also prove that it might be the case in aboriginal societies, "in which men and women were conscious of their existence as parts of a larger human organism rather than as separate self-directing individuals,"[182] that society might indirectly represent religious phenomena. However, when it comes to applying the sociological perspective to all religions and societies as a perfect model explaining the whole puzzle, Hick strongly feels that it "lacks plausibility." Durkheim's theory presupposes a society which is "religiously homogeneous and unified," such as the ones which he examined. Actually, the prerequisite of his theory is "the human condition before the emergence of the autonomous individual exercising a moral and intellectual judgement which may diverge from that of society as a whole."[183] Thus it can only account for the primal religions which existed among aboriginal Australians and other indigenous communities of the world while leaving open many questions regarding the important "features of post-axial religion."[184]

To list but a few, Durkheim's theory cannot explain the universal conception of God, at least within the theistic traditions, as the all loving, merciful and compassionate Creator; nor can it offer much about "the moral independence and creativity of some of the great religious figures who, so far from echoing the voice of their society, uttered a divine judgement upon it."[185] Another illustration of the limitedness of the sociological theory is the case of mysticism which is, contrary to what Durkheim suggests, generally "highly individualistic," or in some denominations of certain traditions amounts to almost a total "detachment from society." Hick mentions, for instance, some Hindu and Buddhist sects, to which I can add some of the Muslim sufi groups, too. Hence Hick concludes that even if sociological theories were to contribute heavily to the modern study of religion in general and to Hick's philosophy in particular, when it is applied to post-axial religions it loses "plausibility" and remains "unproven."[186]

2.3.2. Particularistic Theories[187]

I am aware of the danger of putting *exclusivism* and *inclusivism* together under this heading with which many inclusivists would probably disagree. I agree it might be misleading to put them next to each other. However, my aim here is not to make value judgements about the theories in question. It is quite obvious that Hick has already done that, even though many would disagree with him. The question arises as to why one might bracket them together? For one thing, they are religious interpretations of religion in contrast to the two naturalistic ones considered above. Secondly, both manifest a

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[182] *AIR*, 117.
[183] *AIR*, 117.
[184] To develop the discussion Hick refers to his sometime teacher at Cambridge H H Farmer's *Towards Belief in God*, Chp. 9 (London, SCM Press, 1942) (*AIR*, 117, 124; *POR*, 33).
[185] *AIR*, 117.
[186] *AIR*, 118; *POR*, 34.
[187] I describe them as *particularist*. Because, even though they are not the same in their dealing with other religions, they both stress the particularity of Christian message and of salvation through Jesus.

particularistic approach to the issue of salvation, even if they differ in propounding this. Thus they claim the superiority of one way of salvation, excluding others totally or partially.[188] What I shall try to do, then, is to highlight Hick's comments on both explanations as they appear sporadically throughout his writings.

I will present Hick's objections in two groups. One is his earlier critique of the exclusivism and inclusivism, written in response to the traditional Christian doctrines such as the Incarnation. I will keep this very short though, since these criticisms can be found in other works either specifically on Hick's thought or Christianity and other religions.[189] Instead I shall focus on more of an up-dating of Hick's position on the two stances written as a contribution to a recent book that examines all three solutions to the problem of religious plurality: pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism or *particularism* as the editors of the book choose to call it.[190]

Hick's critique of the exclusivist approach started with his Copernican revolution in theology in the early 1970s, which was firmly developed with the publication of *God and the Universe of Faiths* (1973). The book, which comprises a series of essays, accentuates the major shifts in Hick's theology with daring articles such as "The Copernican Revolution in Theology,"[191] "Christ and Incarnation"[192] and "Incarnation and Mythology."[193] This was followed by the publication of *The Myth of God Incarnate* in 1977, which, as the editor, brought Hick to the third major controversy[194] of his career. *The Myth* propounds three points on Christology and incarnation: firstly, historically, there is nothing among the teachings of Jesus that suggests that he was God incarnate, the Second Person of a divine Trinity; secondly, the historical process of transformation from prophecy to the doctrine of incarnation, which was established officially within Christian Theology at the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon in the fourth and fifth centuries could be traced; thirdly, Hick's own thesis that incarnational language should be construed metaphorically rather than literally in order to understand the plurality of religions.[195]

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[188] In fact I am not the only one to use the term "particularism" to refer to exclusivism and inclusivism. Rose also make the same generalisation almost on the same grounds. He differentiates between exclusivism as "*strong particularism*," and inclusivism as "*weak particularism*" (Rose, *Knowing the Real: John Hick on the Cognitivity of Religions and Religious Pluralism*, New York: Peter Lang, 1996, 60, 85).

[189] See for instance D'Costa, G, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions*, Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell: 1986; D'Costa, *John Hick's Theology of Religions: A Critical Evaluation*, Lanham, New York and London: University Press of America, 1987 and Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, London: SCM, 1993.

[190] Okholm, D L and T R Phillips, eds., *More Than One Way?: Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995. Despite the fact that I do not have any particular objections, unlike Hick, to the phrase *particularism*, throughout the chapter I will continue using mostly exclusivism instead of particularism, since it is well-known and widely-used. But occasionally, I will employ both terms interchangeably.

[191] *GUF*, 120-132.

[192] *GUF*, 1148-164.

[193] *GUF*, 165-179.

[194] *PRP*, 11. The other two are the involvement in AFFOR, All Faiths for One Race, a voluntary organisation against discrimination, especially racism, and his agnostic stance regarding the virgin birth.

[195] *PRP*, 11-12.

What Hick means by the *Copernican revolution in theology* is this: Ptolemaic scholars set up the theory that the earth was the centre of the universe and the movements of the planets were explained by postulated *"epicycles,"* though this had no theoretical support. Developments in astronomy which increased the number of epicycles made the theory less and less convincing. Then Copernicus put forward his *heliocentric theory of the Solar system* which, unlike the old theory, declared that the Sun was at the centre of the universe rather than the earth. Hick analogously argues that the exclusivist Ptolemaic theology, both as represented by the Protestant theologian Kraemer and others[196] and by the Catholic Church up to the Second Council of 1963-65, has lost its credibility. Thus the Second Vatican Council of 1963-65 had to produce "updated epicycles," which meant acknowledging salvation outside the Church whilst retaining the superiority of the Christian way. Karl Rahner is the foremost advocate of this inclusivist stance. However, the inclusivism of the Vatican II and of Rahner, "though magnificently open and charitable,"[197] is problematic because of its assertions concerning *Church-Christianity-Christ-centredness of the universe of faiths*. Therefore, Hick believes that it is now time to establish *the Copernican revolution in theology*, which is the pluralist interpretation of religions. Put simply, the theory proposes that God, or *the Real* in Hick's lately redefined terms, should be taken as central and all other religions ought to be around God, as manifestations of the Real, not vice versa as claimed by the dogmas of different major world religions, such as Christianity, Islam and Hinduism.[198] This is very close to Smith's conclusion that "the end of religion" is "God," and therefore we should drop the "concept of religion" in order to reach that end.[199] Naturally, we have different religions taking us to that end.

Hick concentrates his attack mostly on inclusivism, as represented by Rahner. Picking on his *anonymous Christianity*, he develops two criticisms, which are both related to dialogue. Firstly, Hick points to the fact that the term "anonymous Christian" is an insult to the adherents of other religions and precludes true dialogue because of its chauvinist impression. It is an "honorary status," Hick asserts, "granted unilaterally to people who have not expressed any desire for it."[200] D'Costa responds to Hick's argument by stating that this naming is not "meant to gain approval from, Hindus, Buddhists and others," but only reflects a Christian's "own self-understanding" of others.[201] This, however, does not seem to be convincing, for the term "anonymous Christian" projects the underlying importance of Jesus in gaining salvation and implies the need for conversion, which goes back to the exclusivist Catholic dogma of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. Rahner explicitly clarifies this point in the third thesis[202] while explaining why he chooses "anonymous

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196 *GUF*, 124-25; D'Costa, *Religious Pluralism*, 23.
197 *GUF*, 126.
198 *GUF*, 131-32; Okholm and Phillips, *More Than One Way?*, 82-83.
199 Smith, W C, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991, 201.
200 GHMN, 50.
201 D'Costa, *Religious Pluralism*, 89.
202 Rahner's third thesis reads as follows:
"If the second thesis is correct, then Christianity does not simply confront the member of an extra-Christian religion as a mere non-Christian but as someone who can and must already be

Christian" instead of "anonymous theist," which would mean degrading the important role of Christ as God Incarnate. In other words Rahner, unlike Hick, still considers the religious disposition of people within the framework of Christianity rather than that of the phenomenon of religion.[203]

Secondly, Hick contends that it creates a deadlock in the dialogue, due to the fact that a "Ptolemaic theology can be developed not only from a Christian standpoint but equally from the standpoint of any other faith."[204] Thus, a Hindu may say that "devout Christians are implicit Hindus in virtue of their sincere desire for the truth even though they do not yet know what truth is."[205] Once again, D'Costa disagrees by claiming that the notion of "anonymous Christian" appeases rather than hinders the dialogue since it evinces the way grace works for non-Christians, and therefore is far better than the exclusivist labelling of others as erroneous and the pluralist flattening of differences.[206] This might sound true when D'Costa's explanation is compared to exclusivism. Hick, too, accepts that inclusivism is a better attitude than exclusivism. However, as far as dialogue is concerned, particularly if one conceives Rahner's full theory of inclusivism and mission, one would reckon that Hick has made a good case and his charge still stands. Certainly, the point is that an inclusivist will always expect others' conversion to her/his own religion. That is why similar charges are made by others too.[207]

This argument, however, takes us to a further criticism levelled against Rahner, that of how one comes to grasp that Christianity is the best way to achieve salvation. After all, what Rahner says about Christianity is also claimed for Islam, Hinduism, and so forth. How can one stand in judgement over all religions and resolve that such-and-such a creed is the best for salvation? What are the determiners or criteria for assessing religions? What is the model against which diverse creeds are to be assessed? *Quis custodiet, ipsos custodes?* [208]

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regarded in this or that respect as an *anonymous Christian*" (Rahner, K, *Theological Investigations*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd and New York: Seabury Press, 1966, vol. 5, 131, my italics).

In the third thesis, although Rahner brings the important expression into the understanding of non-Christian religions, namely *anonymous Christian*, he still emphasises the need for missionary work. Since God's salvation cannot be dissociated from Jesus, Rahner calls an adherent of other religions "anonymous Christian" instead of "anonymous theist." With regard to mission, he demands anonymous Christians enter under the safe and relatively guaranteed umbrella of Christianity. Because "the individual who grasps Christianity in a clearer, purer and more reflective way has, other things being equal, a still greater chance of salvation than someone who is merely an anonymous Christian" (Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, v. 5, 132).

[203] Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, v. 5, 132; *GUF*, 127.

[204] GHMN, 52; cf. *GUF*, 131-132.

[205] GHMN, 52; cf. *GUF*, 131-132.

[206] D'Costa, *Religious Pluralism*, 90.

[207] See, Sharpe, E, *Faith Meets Faith: Some Christian Attitudes to Hinduism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, London, SCM Press, 1977, 129; Küng, H, *On Being a Christian*, New York: Doubleday and London: Collins, 1979, 98; Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 45-62.

[208] Who judges the judges?

Rahner's answer to this question is that God has spoken through Christ finally, but Muslims and others surely can make the same claim which might be as much true as Rahner's. One line, developed in the Qur'an for instance, goes as follows: the argument attests that all prophets -who are to be believed in by Muslims as a basic condition of *iman* (faith)- were trying to accomplish the same goal, that is to explain the revelation of God to humanity. All else being equal, Muhammad, the seal of the Prophets, has a superior place in the sight of God. One could regard all believers since Adam as Muslims; by the same token one could also term all religions as islam, insofar as they expound the commands of God, Allah.[209]

For many, especially Hick and other pluralists, Rahner encompasses in a very tentative way the two opposite poles in his theory: (1) the unique message of Christ's revelation and (2) the universal salvific will of God. Since the first overrides the second, Rahner's whole position appears to reach the same place where Kraemer's began. An indication of this is that he still stresses the traditional claims of Christianity in matters of the Incarnation, mission and the role of Church. Despite its complex formula of the embrace of the universal salvific will of God, I reckon that the case for inclusivism is not very different from the case for exclusivism: to give the old dogma of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* a radically reinterpreted form.[210] Therefore, somewhere down the line most inclusivists (e.g. D'Costa) have an expectation of conversion of others to Christianity.[211] Hence, one cannot but agree with Küng's evaluation:

> "This is a pseudo-solution which offers slight consolation. Is it possible to cure a society suffering from a decline in membership by declaring that even non-members are 'hidden' members?"[212]

Here Küng hints to his own solution to the problem: "open dialogue between traditions based on ethical considerations."[213] However, despite Küng's "best intentions," Race thinks that Küng is drawn "into the inclusivist position" developed in his earlier book, *On Being a Christian.*[214] I will, however, leave inclusivism here and proceed to examine Hick's up-to-date critic of exclusivism and inclusivism.

Four Ways

In 1995, Hick engaged in fresh discussions with the representatives of the other two poles in an edited book, *More Than One Way?: Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralist World.* In preparing the book, the editors established good communications between the

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[209] See, Chapter one: Exclusivism (al-Maturidi).
[210] For more information, see Hillman, E, *The Wider Ecumenism: Anonymous Christianity and the Church*, London, Burns & Oates; New York, Herder and Herder, 1968.
[211] D'Costa, *Religious Pluralism*, 125.
[212] Küng, *On Being*, 98
[213] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 2nd ed., 163. For more on Küng's solution, see: Kung, H et al, *Christianity and the World Religions: Paths of Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism*, trans. Heinegg, P, London: SCM, 1993 and Kung, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, trans. Bowden, J, London: SCM Press, 1991.
[214] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 2nd ed., 163.

authors by requesting that every scholar presents his view first, asking others to respond and finally, giving the last word to the presenter to conclude the chapter by responding to the critics' points. Even though the title suggests *four views,* it offers in fact three options in terms of the three-fold typology; what we have here is, however, two different statements of the exclusivist approach:[215] "*A Post-Enlightenment Approach*" by Alister E McGrath and *"An Evidentialist Approach"* by R Douglas Geivett and W Gary Phillips. The former could be described as a "pessimistic agnostic" stance, while the latter is labelled "hard restrictivism."[216] A *cautious inclusivism* is, on the other hand, represented by C H Pinnock. We shall examine all three in turn, mainly by focusing on issues raised by Hick. I start, then, with McGrath's agnostic approach.

Since McGrath remains agnostic towards the unevangelised, he rather focuses in his chapter on the critique of pluralism by picking up Hick's position. Heavily dependent upon the postmodern criticism of Enlightenment reason, McGrath launches a fierce attack on pluralism on the grounds that it does not respect particularity of religious traditions and has an arrogant, imperialist, and unifying attitude towards religions. The whole programme of religious pluralism in the eyes of McGrath is about Westernisation of other religious traditions in the light of Western terms like religion, religions and salvation,[217] a charge often made against Hick's stance which will be dealt with in detail in the forthcoming chapters.

Hick replies that pluralism fully does justice and equally respects all the particular ways of salvation, which is what the whole theory is about, while never intending to create a mega-religion project which would replace existing religions. Hick, furthermore, declares that his hypothesis "does not presuppose any privileged universal vision." Conversely, he charges "Christian absolutism, in McGrath's as in other forms," with claiming a "privileged position from which it is able to locate all non-Christian traditions as either errors or potential preparations for itself."[218] As to arrogance, Hick again returns the charge by saying that "If there is an "immensely arrogant claim of one who sees the full truth," that "one" is not the pluralist but the Christian absolutist -a term for which "Christian particularist" is "a more reader-friendly synonym."[219]

McGrath devotes his whole conclusion to Hick's critical points leaving aside others, possibly due to the immense speculation Hick's description of his position as *polemical* has

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[215] Although the editors deny that they would necessarily agree with the particularist/exclusivist approach, the emphasis given on this approach, both in the introduction and in arranging the contributors, in my opinion, attests that they favour exclusivism against the other two. In the introduction, they defend this biasness towards exclusivism as to balance the pendulum in favour of exclusivism. However, this to me is less than satisfactory.

[216] Okholm and Phillips, *More Than One Way?*, 19-20.

[217] See for more McGrath, A E, *"A Particularist View: A Post-Enlightenment Approach,"* in More Than One Way?: Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World, eds. D L Okholm and T R Phillips, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995, 151-80.

[218] Okholm and Phillips, *More Than One Way?*, 182-83.

[219] Okholm and Phillips, *More Than One Way?*, 183.

spurred.[220] As if to prove Hick's point, McGrath unfortunately accuses pluralism of having roots in and sharing the same "oppressive" "modernist agenda" as "Nazism and Stalinism."[221] He claims to have offered an "informed and scholarly critique of the pluralist position,"[222] namely that of Hick. He, in my view, commits the same fault which he levels against Hick earlier in the book when he responds to Hick's essay; that of being "tired, uninformed, and weary."[223] He does not seem to have read Hick's most important book on the issue: *An Interpretation of Religion*. Therefore, as Hick rightly points out,[224] he quotes Hick's critics rather than his writings or his responses to those writers. McGrath, for example, does not respond to or criticise Hick's important point about the definition of religion and the Wittgensteinian family resemblance theory. Rather he goes on saying that a "'theory of religion' is ... dependent on the prior definition of *religion* on which it is based, and there is no consensus on this notion."[225] As we have already seen extensively in the previous pages, Hick accepts neither a definition nor an essence of religion. He specifically does this to be able to include the different varieties of religions.

With regard to Postmodernism, McGrath writes:

> "Postmodernity is the general intellectual outlook arising after the collapse of modernity. Modernity believed in a world that, in principle, could be understood and mastered. Postmodernity not only tends to regard the world as ultimately being beyond either comprehension or mastery; it regards such comprehension and mastery as being, in any case, immoral."[226]

If one considers *the religious ambiguity of the universe* principle in Hick's philosophy, one can see it is more closely akin to the postmodern outlook rather than to the modern. Certainly pluralism owes a lot to modernity, but in many respects it could well be regarded as a postmodern outlook which welcomes every religious tradition and nourishes tolerance more than the particularistic stance does. As A Race puts it baldly in his critique of exclusivist Leslie Newbigin:

> "With the relativizing of the Enlightenment relativizers, there can be no doubt that a space has been provided for religious belief to regain a measure of self-confidence. But this gain is in relation to secular ideology in so far as the latter has tried to eclipse the reality of God by the appeal to the constraints of reason alone. Newbigin goes further than this, however, by seizing an opportunity to reassert Christian exclusivism: 'To affirm the unique decisiveness of God's action in Jesus Christ is not arrogance; it is the enduring bulwark against the

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[220] A cynic might also argue that this is because McGrath sees Hick's hypothesis as the greatest threat against Christian particularity compared to "hardline exclusivism" and inclusivism which in the end support Christian particularity in different degrees. In fact, after the demise of communism, Hick's pluralism with its relativising power has been described as "the next greatest threat" against Christian particularity by cardinal Ratzinger of the Catholic Church. See for more: Kerr, F, *"Comment: Ratzinger's Hick,"* New Blackfriars 78, 1997, 154-155.
[221] McGrath, *"A Particularist View,"* 206-208.
[222] McGrath, *"A Particularist View,"* 203.
[223] McGrath, *"A Particularist View,"* 66.
[224] Okholm and Phillips, *More Than One Way?*, 182.
[225] McGrath, *"A Particularist View,"* 205-206.
[226] McGrath, *"A Particularist View,"* 207.

> arrogance of every culture to be itself the criterion by which others are judged. The charge of arrogance which is levelled against those who speak of Jesus as unique Lord and Saviour must be thrown back at those who assume that 'modern historical consciousness' has disposed of that faith.' This strikes me as exaggerated a claim as the rigid view of the impact of the Enlightenment he seeks to dethrone.[227]
>
> To rescue the transcendent heart of Christian faith from the inflated claims of certain western (secular) 'traditions of rationality' is reasonable apologetics; to think that this displaces the transcendent heart of other religious traditions is unreasonable dogmatics."[228]

So much for the McGrath-Hick debate. It is time now to examine Hick's response to the second form of *exclusivism* or as the editors name it *"hard restrictivism":*[229] *the evidentialist approach* of R D Geivett and W Gary Phillips.[230]

In the first part of their article, Geivett & Phillips start with a survey of the human condition in relation to the universe and God to establish the possibility of a special revelation by using what they call "extrabiblical evidence." In the second part, they go on to assert the particularity or distinctiveness of Christianity by using "the available biblical" evidence, an approach which makes them uniquely "evidentialist" in the exposition of the problem. They clearly state that their position, as with others presented in the book, is "defeasible"[231] and "contrary to popular belief, particularism does not entail dogmatism."[232]

Hick begins by attacking the softened replacement term *particularism* for *exclusivism.* He believes that it is "meaningless because everything is particular, so that to describe Christianity as particular is to say nothing particular about it!" However, he ironically takes this as a good sign suggesting that they cannot stomach the harshness of their position. This is because "they are conscious that a frank exclusivism, which accepts the implications of their view that 'individual salvation depends on explicit personal faith in Jesus Christ' -namely that the large majority of the human race are condemned by God to eternal perdition- is so morally and religiously revolting that they cannot bring themselves to say it explicitly."[233]

Hick's first criticism runs against the natural theology of Geivett & Phillips. Hick finds their argument that "the universe must have a beginning and therefore a personal

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[227] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 153-154.
[228] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 154-155.
[229] Okholm and Phillips, *More Than One Way?*, 19. The authors, however, would like to describe their line either *"exclusivism or restrictivism,"* even though they refrain from doing so due to the "misleading negative connotations -especially in suggesting a kind of unwarranted dogmatism-" of both terms and refer to their position simply as "particularism" (Geivett, R D and W G Phillips, *"A Particularist View: An Evidentialist Approach,"* in More Than One Way?: Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World, ed. D L Okholm and T R Phillips, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House: 1995, 214).
[230] For more see Geivett & Phillips, *"A Particularist View,"* 213-45. For the sake of convenience, subsequently, I shall refer to them as Geivett & Phillips. Pinnock describes them as the students of Hick.
[231] They define *defeasibility* as a "position that may be true but is as yet neither decisively demonstrated nor decisively refuted." (Geivett & Phillips, *"A Particularist View,"* 244).
[232] Geivett & Phillips, *"A Particularist View,"* 244.
[233] Okholm and Phillips, *More Than One Way?*, 246.

Creator" inconclusive. He thinks that their arguments "convince only those who already believe their conclusion. They would never convince a thoughtful agnostic." Hick suggests that philosophy can "open the door to religious belief; however, it is not philosophy but religious experience that propels anyone through the door."[234]

Secondly, Hick believes that their use of biblical evidence is "far removed from contemporary mainline biblical scholarship."[235] Hick then picks up his favourite example, the Incarnation, and by quoting New Testament scholars like C F D Moule, J Dunn and the late Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsay, suggests that Jesus never thought that he was God.[236]

Finally, Hick turns to the moral difficulties with particularism. He rightly exposes the implications of particularism, which are carefully avoided in both versions, for non-Christians. He points out that "the large majority of the human race thus far have, through no fault of their own, been consigned to eternal perdition, and that in the future an even larger proportion will meet this fate." We then hear Hick's sharp criticism against exclusivism in the usual form: "This would not be the work of a God of limitless and universal love, who values all human beings equally, but of an arbitrary cosmic tyrant, more fit to be reviled as the devil than to be worshipped as God."[237]

As was the case in McGrath's reply, Geivett & Phillips spend most of their space to respond to Hick's criticisms in their conclusion. Regarding the first point, they respond that their hypothesis "that the universe had an absolute beginning" with a personal Creator is better supported "by the available evidence than any other cosmological theory." They try to produce more evidence to bolster this view.[238] None, however, seems to me to be conclusive. This is a point, I believe, that can be solved neither philosophically nor scientifically since we will probably never have the chance to re-run the whole creation system. I am sure different parties in different discussion groups will be able to find data to support their argument depending on their commitments, which brings us back to Hick's point about the religious ambiguity of the universe.

One further point should be made about the plausibility of arguments for religious belief. To support their argument from natural theology, Geivett & Phillips remark that they "know of individuals, including scientists and other mature intellectuals, who have been converted to theism in response to the sort of evidence"[239] they have produced. I find this line of thinking totally unacceptable. For me, this is not the issue at stake at all. If an argument is right, it is right; if it is wrong, it is wrong, regardless of how many were or were not convinced or converted by it. To use one of Hick's examples, the Ptolemaic picture of the universe was believed and supported by many scientists and mature

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[234] Okholm and Phillips, *More Than One Way?*, 247-48.
[235] Okholm and Phillips, *More Than One Way?*, 248.
[236] Okholm and Phillips, *More Than One Way?*, 249.
[237] Okholm and Phillips, *More Than One Way?*, 249-50.
[238] Geivett & Phillips, *"A Particularist View,"* 263-64.
[239] Geivett & Phillips, *"A Particularist View,"* 264.

intellectuals for centuries, but this did not make it true and eventually it had to be abandoned.

To the second objection of Hick, as could be predicted, they enlist another set of scholars, such as P Lapide and W Pannenberg, who affirm that in the light of New Testament scholarship Jesus' deity could be established, especially by appealing to the Resurrection.

On the final point concerning the moral impossibility of Christian exclusivism, they do not, once more, satisfactorily answer the charges. They do not, for instance, respond to the very, if not the most, important question about the relationship between accidental birth and religion. Rather they appear to take a pessimistic agnostic line, as did McGrath, by declaring that "the loving heavenly Father of Jesus' teaching is sovereign over all events in the lives of human persons, including the circumstances of their births."[240] To avoid the question, they also introduce free will into the issue, an important point with which many would agree, only to conclude that if one is determined, one is granted the right to go to hell. But we are left wondering about the fate of millions who responded to God in a different way through no fault of their own. It might seem reasonable to preach the superiority of one's own religion to comfort the audience, but to be able to figure out what it would be like to be condemned to hell, one ought to imagine oneself in *others*' shoes and think twice before granting the right to others to go to hell. I suppose what I am saying is that it is easy to say "the Truth is out there and everybody should follow it." But if we consider what it would be like to step outside of our beloved religion and examine it carefully before accepting it, then one can understand how large an effect the society and the environment we live in have on us. Thus, to me, conversion is not a viable option to the problem of religious diversity and salvation, if we think of masses rather than individuals.

They strangely restate the question and ask: "Is it possible for the loving heavenly Father of Jesus' teaching to allow that only that minority of men and women who hear and believe the gospel receive eternal life?" They answer positively and assert "certainly this seems possible."[241] To justify this conclusion, they appeal to the *doctrine of middle knowledge*, one possible answer commonly used in Islam too. They conclude with a hint from Geivett's study on Hick's theodicy:[242] "Christianity is for people who want to find out from God whether their intuitions about hell, for example, are correct; it is not for people who have made up their minds a priori that hell cannot be real."[243]

Having heard the *hard restrictivism* of Geivett & Phillips, we now deserve to hear some good news and turn to examine Pinnock's inclusivism and Hick's evaluation of it. Pinnock, siding with Vatican II, defines himself as a "cautious" inclusivist unlike the "less

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[240] Geivett & Phillips, "*A Particularist View*," 269.
[241] Geivett & Phillips, "*A Particularist View*," 269.
[242] Geivett, R D, *Evil and the Evidence for God: The Challenge of John Hick's Theodicy*, Philadelphia: Temple University, 1993.
[243] Geivett & Phillips, "*A Particularist View*," 270.

cautious" Rahner, who, in Pinnock's opinion, "is very positive about other faiths and considers them to possess a salvific status."[244] His description of inclusivism is as follows:

> "Inclusivism believes that, because God is present in the whole world (premise), God's grace is also at work in some way among all people, possibly even in the sphere of religious life (inference). It entertains the possibility that religion may play a role in the salvation of the human race, a role preparatory to the gospel of Christ, in whom alone fullness of salvation is found."[245]

He also calls this cautious approach "'modal' inclusivism." On this, he writes:

> "Modal inclusivism then holds that grace operates outside the church and *may be* encountered in the context of other religions. My version of it is oriented to the Spirit as graciously present in the world among all peoples, even in non-Christian religious contexts. I believe that the Spirit is present in advance of missions, preparing the way of the Lord. One could call it a pneumatological approach. Such inclusivism offers the reader an alternative to exclusivism, which is pessimistic about such possibilities, and to pluralism, which posits an unknown Reality everywhere present in religion."[246]

It is worth noting that since Pinnock is the closest to Hick in his approach to the problem of religious pluralism, in contrast to his previous responses Hick begins with enumerating the three agreed points between inclusivism and pluralism. These are (1) the rejection of damnation of the majority of the human race, (2) that religion is a "mixture of good and evil," and (3) that "sanctity in persons and religions" exist outside Christianity.[247]

Hick firstly takes up the point about the shift in how Christianity has responded to the problem by using demographic calculations. He notes that the conversion of the non-Christian majority to Christianity "in this life is a fantasy," owing to the demographic changes taking place right now, i.e. the rapid population increase in the Islamic world against the decrease in the Christian world, which might make Islam the biggest religion on earth in near future. Hick mentions the talk of possible postmortem salvations, a major shift for both Catholics and Protestants. Hick certainly thinks the shift falls short of solving the problem and questions Pinnock and other inclusivists: "The question is not whether change is needed, but whether it is sufficient simply to shift the problem in the unknown realm beyond the grave."[248]

The next point Hick takes up is "the distinctive religious lives of non-Christians," which the theory does not do justice to. Hick reiterates his understanding of salvation: "In its most fundamental sense, salvation is not judicial transaction between the Father and the Son, or a future postmortem possibility, but a human transformation that begins in this life

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[244] Pinnock, C H, *"An Inclusivist View,"* in More Than One Way?: Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World, ed. Okholm, D L and T R Phillips, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House: 1995, 98-99.
[245] Pinnock, *"An Inclusivist View,"* 98.
[246] Pinnock, *"An Inclusivist View,"* 100.
[247] Geivett & Phillips, *"A Particularist View,"* 124-25.
[248] Geivett & Phillips, *"A Particularist View,"* 125-26.

from natural self-centredness to a new orientation centred in the Divine, the Ultimate, the Real."[249]

As a postscript to this, Hick suggests that the religious life of the human race goes much deeper and longer than the almost two-thousand year old Christianity. The religious life of humanity indicates no special preparation towards Christianity. There has been, is and will always be an interchange between human beings and the Real. So far as we can tell, "the non-Christian religions are more than 'pre-messianic' preparations for Christian conversion. They are different but ... equally authentic spheres of salvation/liberation."[250]

To Hick's first challenge, Pinnock responds with the analogy of Abraham, who is designated a "believer" (*Hebrews* 11:6) and the "father of believers by Paul"; even though he was not a Christian. He must have had a postmortem encounter, in Pinnock's view, with the "triune God" as his saviour. The believers of other religions would naturally agree with him in that.[251] For someone like Pinnock who is fully committed to his belief, this may sound a reasonable solution. But it seems to me that Hick's challenge still stands and the whole solution looks too theoretical, forced out of difficult circumstances.

In relation to the distinctiveness of religions, Pinnock shares the exclusivist solution in that the doctrinal differences between religions, such as Incarnation in the case of Christianity, may in fact boost dialogue rather than discourage it. In other words, he contends that we can have dialogue "not only in areas of practical co-operation, but in areas of theological and historical conviction as well."[252] I cannot see how one can have productive dialogue regarding crucial doctrines like Incarnation, a suggestion which may irritate not only many Christians but also others, including Muslims. Therefore, it is very likely that the dialogue Pinnock favours would end up stuck in the first phase rather than necessitating "interreligious apologetics." The answer, I believe, does not meet the criticism.

If we have reason to be dissatisfied with Pinnock's answers, then we can proceed to examine Hick's solution to the problem of religious diversity: *pluralism*.

2.4. Partial Conclusions

In this chapter I demonstrated first how Hick approaches religious experience and the phenomenon of religion and second how he responded to the well known accounts of religious diversity, namely naturalistic and particularistic. By drawing on the conclusions of several contemporary philosophers of religion, e.g. Richard Swinburne's "principle of credulity," and by extending Wittgenstein's theory of "seeing-as" to "experiencing-as," Hick proved the justifiability of religious experience. Hick argued that it was a cognitive experience, i.e. real as the believers take it to be, and not total delusion. Next we studied how he applied this, as a ubiquitous experience, to the phenomenon of religion. He

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[249] Geivett & Phillips, "*A Particularist View*," 127.
[250] Geivett & Phillips, "*A Particularist View*," 128.
[251] Pinnock, "*An Inclusivist View*," 148.
[252] Pinnock, "*An Inclusivist View*," 147.

contended that religion "cannot be adequately defined but only described,"[253] and that "family resemblance theory" could be a fitting model to approach religions. Even though he did not believe that there can be one single essence of religion, he took "the belief in the transcendent" as the main feature of the great world religions. He also divided religions into two: pre- and post-axial religions and focused his examination on five post-axial religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. His next goal was to evaluate the available accounts of religion from naturalistic and particularistic perspectives. In this respect he engaged in discussions with Freud's psychological explanation, Durkheim's sociological explanation and particularistic Christian understandings. He concluded that none was satisfactory, thus we needed a new religious theory both respecting the cognitivity of religions, i.e. taking religions as religions not delusions, unlike the naturalistic theories, and also of their veridicality without branding them either totally or partially false, except one's own. Thus we arrive at Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, which will be examined thoroughly in the following chapter.

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[253] *AIR*, 5.

CHAPTER THREE

3. RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

"Two hands, two feet, two eyes, good,
as it should be, but no separation
of the Friend and your loving.
Any dividing there
makes other untrue distinctions like 'Jew,'
and 'Christian,' and 'Muslim.'"

Rûmî[1]

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I offered an account of Hick's defence of the veridicality of religious experience, not only one's own but other's as well. Then I examined his criticism and the eventual rejection of alternative interpretations of religious plurality, namely the naturalistic and particularist explanations. In what follows, I shall try to offer an extensive survey of Hick's version of the problem in order to see what he has to say about the evident plurality of religions.

I present Hick's pluralist hypothesis in two parts. The first, *a christian theology of religions,* is his earlier stance starting from 1970s approximately lasting up to 1980s. In this period Hick's main aim is to locate Christianity's place within the universe of faiths revolving around God rather than one religion, which Hick named "the Copernican revolution in theology." Theocentricism is the main characteristic of this period, for which Hick is still remembered in certain academic circles. As a result of Hick's Copernican outlook, he had to rethink some of the traditional Christian doctrines, namely incarnation. He developed criticisms from three aspects: world religions, philosophical or linguistic and finally biblical criticism. He tries to show that when we look at the world religions carefully, we find that some of the founders of those religions were also divinised because of the high status they had in the eyes of their followers. So the incarnation of Jesus Christ was not unique in this sense. Philosophically, Hick shows the impossibilities of explaining incarnation and concludes that since it is a myth, it should be construed metaphorically, not literally. Lastly, in this section, Hick appeals to modern biblical studies to show that the verses related to incarnation of Jesus Christ cannot be authenticated.

In the second section, *a philosophy of religions*, I present Hick's up-to-date pluralistic hypothesis, which covers approximately from 1980s onwards. The most apparent feature of Hick's hypothesis in this model is that it is Kantian and Real-centred. The criticisms levelled at Hick's theology of religions made him rethink and develop his thesis further. Thus he replaces God with the ineffable Real and adopts the Kantian distinction of noumenon and phenomenon to distinguish between the traditional religions (the phenomenal Real) and the transcendent reality (the noumenal Real) as the ground of religious phenomena. We travel with Hick through Kantian categories to conceive of the

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[1] Rumi, *Unseen Rain*, 21.

gods and the absolutes of the religions, schematised as personae and impersonae manifestations of the Real "within actual religious experience." Lastly, I examine Hick's suggestion of mythological truth to solve the conflicting truth-claims of religions and "human transformation from self-centredness to Reality-centredness" as soteriological criterion.

3.2. An Interpretation: Religious Pluralism

D'Costa points out that "three inter-connected problems" led Hick to develop his theology of religions: first was his Irenaean theodicy, i.e. the universal salvific will of God, second was his move to Birmingham and the third was his eschatology, as represented in *Death and Eternal Life*.[2] His Irenaean theodicy required him to conclude that "any viable Christian theodicy must affirm the ultimate salvation of all God's creatures."[3] The question for Hick then was "how... to reconcile the notion of there being one, and only one, true religion with a belief in God's universal saving activity?"[4] Throughout his books this is an issue which crops up frequently.[5] The second motive, his move to the multi-racial and multi-faith Birmingham environment, made the previous problem "a live and immediate one"[6] through his involvement in community relations.

I initially believed that Hick's epistemology in *Faith and Knowledge* would have eventually made him a pluralist, even if he had not come to Birmingham. His move to Birmingham, I thought then, must have only expedited the process, since he had to face the issues head on in a multi-faith and multi-cultural society. However, when I interviewed him in November '97, I found out that this assumption was wrong. When I tested my theory then, he contradicted me, suggesting that he could probably have remained an exclusivist throughout his career like so many of his colleagues.[7] For him, the Birmingham experience was in fact the starting point which made him rethink the whole theological package which he as an adolescent accepted unquestionably.[8]

The third motive, the production of *Death and Eternal Life*, I believe, contrary to D'Costa, is a direct result and an experimental contribution in another area of the philosophy of religions, eschatology, rather than a cause for deepening religious pluralist arguments. To support this, one may cite Hick's description of his work as an exemplar of

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[2] D'Costa, *Hick's*, 12-13.
[3] *GHMN*, 4-5.
[4] *GHMN*, 4-5.
[5] In his book, *Knowing the Real*, Kenneth Rose does not mention this point at all. It might be that he considers it too obvious to be touched upon. But, in my opinion, this significant point cannot be put aside. D'Costa is quite right in emphasising this significant aspect of Hick's motivation (for more on this, see D'Costa, *Hick's*, 46-48).
[6] *GHMN*, 5.
[7] In fact even after one becomes aware of religious diversity, it might produce a reverse effect on a believer. This is the situation Plantinga describes when he suggests that "a fresh or heightened awareness of the facts of religious pluralism could bring about a reappraisal of one's religious life, a reawakening, a new or renewed and deepened grasp and apprehension" of one's religious beliefs (Plantinga, A, *"Pluralism,"* 215).

a "global theology of death, exploring both differences and the deeper convergence of insight on this subject between Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism."[8]

Once Hick empirically saw that the adherents of other religions, after all, were also good human beings, striving, in many cases, for similar goals to those advocated by Christianity, he acknowledged the fact that other religions were also appropriate ways of attaining salvation. Having established this, he had to find a philosophical explanation for the problem of religious plurality. He rejected the alternative explanations, namely the naturalistic and exclusivist ones, as noted earlier, on the grounds that the former did not explain the phenomenon of religion fully and the latter did not grant the full salvific right to other religions.

The gradual development of Hick's religious pluralism could be examined in two stages. Firstly, as early as the 1970s, Hick proposed a *Christian theology of religions*, an approach initiated by an article written as a concluding remark to *Truth and Dialogue: The Relationship Between World Religions*,[9] of which he was the editor. This was followed by the publication of his controversial article *"The Copernican Revolution in Theology."*[10] The criticisms levelled at his Christian theology of religions led him to consider more deeply the issues related to religious pluralism during 1980s and onwards. The result was his "philosophy of religions," which was presented fully in his *magnum opus, An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent,* delivered at the University of Edinburgh as the Gifford Lectures of 1986-87 and published in 1989. This shift took place not solely in response to criticisms, but more importantly, one might claim, for intellectual reasons, because "what was originally a theological issue... has now become... a fundamentally philosophical issue."[11] As a result, he moved from a "theocentric Christian theology of religions" to a "Real-centred, post-Christian theology of religions."[12] While doing this, we observe Hick using both his theological background as a major contemporary theologian, as his contributions to theodicy, Christology and other important issues bear witness, and his philosophical background as a leading figure in the philosophy of religion, as demonstrated in relation to issues like the nature of religious language and religious experience.

This classification, to my knowledge, was first introduced by K Rose in his evaluation of Hick's religious pluralism, published under the title *Knowing the Real: John Hick on the Cognitivity of Religions and Religious Pluralism*. Despite the fact that one can trace a gradual development in Hick's ideas with regard to religious pluralism, it is not

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[8] *GIIMN*, 8.

[9] Even though published in 1974, the book was the outcome of the Conference on the Philosophy of Religion, which took place in April 1970 at the University of Birmingham and chaired by Hick, to discuss the "apparently conflicting truth-claims" of the world religions (Hick, J, ed. *Truth and Dialogue: The Relationship between World Religions*, London: Sheldon Press and Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974). In terms of actual production and of presentation, his first ideas appeared in that Birmingham conference in 1970.

[10] *GUF*, 120-132.

[11] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 66.

[12] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 89.

possible to identify a sharp dividing line in time between the two sections of theories (theological and philosophical level) within the boundaries of Hick's philosophy. In fact, there is none. Even then, one is tempted to divide the two before and after 1980. But this, too, will be seriously misleading, because Hick has never isolated himself from the Christological problems raised with his theology and philosophy of religions. As a case in point, one can take his article "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity,"[13] where he deliberately uses a theological, that is Christian, language (such as God not the Real) to set out his argument.[14] Another good example of this is *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, which was written after the maturation of his philosophy of religions. Nevertheless, despite all its deficiencies, the typology serves as a useful tool to follow the chronological development within Hick's theory.

3.3. A Christian Theology of Religions

In 1970 in the concluding remarks of *Truth and Dialogue*, Hick identifies three major difficulties with constructing a theology of religions:

> "It is... possible to distinguish three aspects of this problem -differences in modes of experience of the divine reality; differences of philosophical and theological theory concerning that reality; and differences in the key, or revelatory, experiences that unify a stream of religious experience and thought."[15]

For the first, he gives the example of personal and non-personal experiences of God: as in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and some branches of Hinduism and as in Buddhism and Advaita Hinduism, respectively. He thinks at this stage these could be "understood as complementary rather than as rival truths."[16]

As to the second type, theological and philosophical differences in theory, he cites the different understanding of life between Christianity, where there is only one life in this world, and Indian religions, allowing for reincarnation. Hick considers these differences as belonging to the "historical, culturally conditioned aspect of religion, within which any degree of change is possible."[17] In other words, they are to be overcome in time.

Finally comes the most difficult part of all: the holy scriptures, "the Vedas, the Torah, the Buddha, Christ and the Bible, the Qur'an," each of which claims to be the unique and absolute revelation. As a case in point, he mentions the doctrine of Incarnation in

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[13] *MCU*, 16-36.

[14] It is worth quoting extensively what Hick says about the interchange between his theology and philosophy of religions:

> "In this [essay] I have been treating the question of the place of Christianity within the wider religious life of humanity as a topic in Christian theology. I have accordingly used our Christian term, God, to refer to the ultimate Reality to which, as I conceive, the great religious traditions constitute different human response. But when one stands back from one's own tradition to attempt a philosophical interpretation of the fact of religious plurality one has to take full account of nonpersonal as well as of personal awareness of the Ultimate. I have tried to do this elsewhere; but it was not necessary to complicate this study, as an intra-Christian discussion, in that way" (*MCU*, 34).

[15] *TD*, 152; *GUF*, 148-49.

[16] *TD*, 152.

[17] *TD*, 152-53.

Christianity and quotes some of the solutions, presented by some of the contributors, as hopeful efforts for the future.[18] But he thinks none offers the final solution, if there could be any.[19]

Then he puts forward his general theory:

> "It is... possible to consider the hypothesis that the great religions are all, at their experiential roots, in contact with the same ultimate divine reality, but that their differing experiences of that reality, interacting over the centuries with the different thought forms of different cultures, have led to increasing differentiation and contrasting elaboration- so that Hinduism, for example, is a very different phenomenon from Christianity, and very different ways of conceiving and experiencing the divine occur within them."[20]

The quotation gives us one of the fundamental features of Hick's understanding of religion which prevails throughout his philosophy: a transcendent divine reality and different responses to this reality by human beings. In his recent article "*Perils of Pluralism*,"[21] Kelly James Clark, having cited the same distinction from Hick, comments on the taxonomy by way of elaboration: "This divine Reality is one yet capable of being experienced in a multitude of ways."[22] He, however, points out in the footnote that this is true only of Hick's earlier writings and in his later works, Hick "rejects this view."[23] Unfortunately, he does not give any reference for this claim. Therefore we cannot test the reliability of this contention; but it is highly likely that it is not accurate. For one thing, although he bases this claim on Hick's earlier writings, he never actually uses Hick's earlier writings, but relies only on two late works, *Problems of Religious Pluralism* and *An Interpretation of Religion*. Nevertheless, he borrows one thing from Hick's earlier writings: without any given reason, he replaces *the Real* by *God*, which is very unlike Hick. There is no such thing as God as a generic name for the Ultimate Reality in the late Hick's writings. As is well known, because of its inappropriateness and narrowness, Hick replaced God with "the Real." Contrary to Clark's claim, "God" is one way of experiencing or describing the Ultimate Reality. There are certainly other ways of experiencing the Real too. What could be the reason for this apparent confusion or misunderstanding? There might be two possible answers.

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[18] *TD*, 154-55.

[19] By the time the book was published, he had offered his solution, the metaphorical understanding of the doctrine in *God and the Universe of Faiths*, a point which he also touched upon in the book.

[20] *TD*, 151.

[21] Clark, K J, *"Perils of Pluralism,"* Faith and Philosophy 14, no. 3, 1997, 303-320. Clark's article is unique in two ways: one is in its evaluation of religious pluralism by using the Bayesian Theorem of Probability, an application of Swinburne's argument for the existence of God to Hick's hypothesis. The other unique element of Clark's article is in its introduction of a four-fold taxonomy for examining religious plurality: i. The Kantian Explanation, ii. The Cultural Filter Explanation, iii. The Perversity Explanation and iv. The Epistemically Privileged Explanation.
To my knowledge, this is one of two articles which apply probability theory to religious pluralism. The other is by Schellenberg, J L, *"Pluralism and Probability,"* Religious Studies 33, 1997.

[22] Clark, *"Perils,"* 304.

[23] Clark, *"Perils,"* 319.

The first one is a common misperception among some scholars of Hick's work between two positions. Rose thinks that despite the fact that Hick took his hypothesis beyond the boundaries of Christological and theological debates and moved on from a theology of religions to a philosophy of religions, some scholars still consider his position as "theocentric."[24] Paul Knitter's classification of Hick's work as a "theocentric model" of religious pluralism[25] had a big part to play in this misperception, especially for those who are not very familiar with Hick's works.[26] Following one of these authors, Clark also might have been mistaken in identifying Hick's latest position. Despite Clarks' knowledge of Hick's *An Interpretation*, which does not mention much of theocentrism and Copernican revolution in theology, in his reading of Hick, the substitution of the Real by God makes this more likely to be the case.

Another possibility is that Clark might be pointing at Hick's distinction of the Real as noumenon and phenomenon. Since the noumenal Real is totally ineffable and beyond the scope of human conception, obviously it cannot be experienced directly either, which runs against Hick's abandoned earlier position that Clark cites.

In any case, Hick's distinction is in line with at least the Abrahamic, that is Judeo-Christian and Islamic, revelation-traditions. From an Islamic perspective, for example, Muslims believe that the first man, Adam, was also a prophet, and acknowledge that different eras and/or nations required different prophets. The main principle here is that there has never been and never will be a punishment without the prior warning of the prophets.[27] The warning process continued until the arrival of the seal of the Prophets, Muhammad, who, according to Muslims, completed the circle and was the last prophet.[28]

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[24] Rose cites, for instance: Carruthers, G H, *Christian Theology of World Religions: An Elaboration and Evaluation of the Position of John Hick*, Lanham, New York and London: University Press of America, 1990; Pinnock, C H, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992; Sanders, J, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992 and Nash, R H, *Is Jesus the Only Saviour?*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994.

[25] Knitter, P, *No Other Name? A Critical Study of Christian Attitudes Towards the World Religions*, London: SCM: 1985, 146-152.

[26] Indeed, even those who seem to be familiar with Hick's latest work commit the same mistake of labelling Hick's work as a theocentric Copernican model. The case of the Harvard professor Diana L Eck probably illustrates this point best. She is aware of *An Interpretation* but assesses Hick's philosophy according to *God and the Universe of Faiths* (189-190) and leaves the exploration of *An Interpretation* for her readers by including it in the "selected readings" list (248). Unaware that Hick has already moved beyond the "Copernican revolution in theology," she, then, points out its limits (on the basis that, contrary to that Copernican revolution, we now know that there are several solar systems in the universe) and proposes to move beyond it (Eck, D L, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1993, 190).

[27] *The Qur'an* declares: "We, indeed, sent among every people an apostle" (16:36) and "There was never any people without a warner having lived among them" (35:24). Cf. other verses in the Qur'an 2:115; 4:163-165; 6:130-131; 13:7; 23:44.

[28] Islam, in this respect, faces the same challenge as Christianity did some hundred years ago from historical critics like Troeltsch, which cannot be easily fended off. The argument, mainly, is that there cannot be a final and full revelation so long as history continues. In the last chapter, we shall look at the Islamic responses to the problem in Islam's response to religious pluralism.

Two years later, in 1972, we observe Hick presenting three lectures[29] which delve into the problem more deeply, from which came the famous title "The Copernican Revolution in Theology." To expand the above-mentioned general principle, i.e. one divine reality and different approaches to it, then, he was saying in "The New Map of the Universe of Faiths:"

> Let us begin with the recognition, which is made in all the main religious traditions, that the ultimate divine reality is infinite and as such transcends the grasp of human mind. God, to use our Christian term, is infinite. He is not a thing, a part of the universe, existing alongside other things; nor is he a being falling under a certain kind. And therefore he cannot be defined or encompassed by human thought... From this it follows that the different encounters with the transcendent within the different religious traditions may all be encounters with the one infinite reality, though with partially different and overlapping aspects of that reality."[30]

To illustrate his point, Hick usually quotes the familiar examples. Among them are the distinctions between *nirguna* Brahman ("the eternal self-existent divine reality, beyond the scope of all human categories, including personality") and *saguna* Brahman ("God in relation to his creation and with the attributes which express this relationship")[31] in Hinduism; the ultimate, formless Dharmakaya and Sambhogakaya, which appears to devotees as concrete Buddha through meditation, and the Nirmanakaya, the body of the historical Buddha, in Mahayana Buddhism; *dharmata dharmakaya,* the Dharmakaya (nirvana) *an sich,* and the *upaya dharmakaya, nirvana* manifesting as Amida, the Buddha of infinite compassion, in the Pure Land Buddhist tradition; the Jewish scholar Maimonides' distinction between "the essence and the manifestations of God;" the Muslim Sufis' distinction between *al-Haqq,* "the abyss of Godhead," and Allah, revealed out of abyss in the Qur'an; Meister Eckhart's distinction between the Godhead (*Gottheit/deitas*) and God (*Gott/deus*); and finally, from two contemporary Christian scholars, Paul Tillich's distinction between "the God above" and "the God of theism"[32] and Gordon Kaufman's distinction between the "real God" and the "available God."[33]

Hick acknowledges his debt to Indian thought for this principle. He cites from Rig-Vedas:

> "They call it Indra, Mitra, Varuna, and Agni
> And also heavenly, beautiful Garutman:
> The real one is one, though sages name it variously."[34]

Within the contemporary British context, Hick reads the Vedas as follows:

> "They call it Jahweh, Allah, Krishna, Param Atma,

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[29] The titles for the lectures were "The Essence of Christianity," "The Copernican Revolution in Theology" and "The New Map of the Universe of Faiths;" and they were delivered in Carrs Lane Church Centre, Birmingham, in February and March 1972. Hick welcomes "the high degree of theological interest" from the audiences (*GUF*, xvi).
[30] *GUF*, 139.
[31] *GUF*, 144; *AIR*, 236.
[32] *AIR*, 236-37.
[33] Kaufman, G, *God the Problem*, Cambridge, MA., Harvard UP, 1973, 85-86, 95-100.
[34] *GUF*, 140.

And also holy, blessed Trinity

The real is one, though sages name it differently."[35]

Another quotation comes from the Bhagavad Gita. The Lord Krishna, the personal God of love, states: "Howsoever men approach me, even so do I accept them; of, on all sides, whatever path they may choose is mine."[36]

He also mentions, at this stage, the Indian parable, which would become more troublesome than Hick probably anticipated as the discussions progressed: *the blind man and the elephant,* ascribed to the Buddha.[37] According to the parable, a group of blind men, who did not know what an elephant was, were presented with an elephant. Each described an elephant in terms of his experience of a part of the animal. Therefore one said it was a "living pillar", reasoning from its leg, another said it was a "great snake", because of his experience of its trunk, and so on.[38] The parable elicited much criticism from Hick's opponents, who pointed out that in the elephant example there was the third party, the story teller or observer, who knew what an elephant was. In the case of religions, however, there is no observer above the Real, then still God, who can evaluate the reports of the prophets or followers. In other words, nobody can claim to have a "God's eye view" of the religions.[39] More importantly, none of the blind examiners was correct in their descriptions of the elephant, which supports the naturalistic claims that religion is *toto illusory* against Hick's claim of cognitivity. Hick eventually admitted the inadequacies associated with the parable and dropped it from his later writings.[40]

We may now proceed to examine Hick's more pompous title, the so-called "*Copernican Revolution in Theology.*" In this 1972 essay, Hick argued for a radical shift in Christian thinking which suggested that Christianity should drop its historical claim of offering the best way for salvation; rather it should regard itself as one of the equal ways for salvation. Christianity ought to stop expecting other religions to revolve around it and take its appropriate place among other world religions and let everything revolve around God. The analogy was to Copernicus' revolutionary heliocentric cosmological model in astronomy, which replaced Ptolemy's geocentric model, by putting the sun rather than the earth in the centre.

In this essay, Hick starts by giving a detailed history of the attitudes developed within Christianity towards the salvation of others, i.e. the interpretations of the Roman Catholic principle of *"extra ecclesiam nulla salus:* outside the church there is no salvation"[41] or in the

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[35] *GUF*, 140.
[36] *GUF*, 140 (*Bhagavad Gita* IV, 11).
[37] The traces of the parable can be found in Islamic Sufi writings (Schimmel, A, *"The Muslim Tradition,"* in The World's Religious Traditions, ed. F Whaling, Edinburgh: T & T Clark: 1984, 140).
[38] *GUF*, 140.
[39] Heim, S M, *"Salvations: A More Pluralistic Hypothesis,"* Modern Theology 10, no. 4, 1994, 355.
[40] As a result of this inadequacy, we cannot find any trace of the parable in *An Interpretation of Religion* and *The Rainbow of Faiths*. Probably because of this shift, we cannot find any mention of the parable in Rose's book, *Knowing the Real*, either, as one of the latest studies on Hick.
[41] *GUF*, 120.

Protestant version: "outside Christianity there is no salvation."[42] Not surprisingly, Hick names the whole movement as "Ptolemaic theology," however brave the efforts might appear.[43]

Compared to its predecessors, Hick believes that the efforts of the Second Vatican Council of 1963-65 are "magnificently open and charitable."[44] He also examines Rahner's solution of "anonymous Christianity," proposed in 1961, just before Vatican II, and then the younger Hans Küng's proposal regarding the Catholic Church as the "extra-ordinary way," while others are the "ordinary way" to salvation. Hick acknowledges the fact that both are important endeavours, but nevertheless new epicycles in the old Ptolemaic theology. Neither, in Hick's opinion, has the courage to face the bold perspective of the Copernican revolution in theology. He further suggests that every religion could develop its own Ptolemaic theology and, if need be, new epicycles around it.

Hick summarises his Copernican revolution:

> "It involves a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre to the realisation that it is *God* who is at the centre, and that all the religions of mankind, including our own, serve and revolve around him."[45]

He finishes his paper with some disturbing questions:

> "Can we be so entirely confident that to have been born in our particular part of the world carries with it the privilege of knowing the full religious truth, whereas to be born elsewhere involves the likelihood of having only partial and inferior truth? Is there, one asks oneself, some vestige here of the imperialism of the christian west in relation to 'lesser breeds without the law'?"[46]

The main criticism of Hick's Copernican revolution centred around his usage of God. If by God, it is argued, he means a notion of personal God as understood in theistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and theistic Hinduism, then he was producing another epicycle in the Ptolemaic theology by using a theistic notion to evaluate non-theistic religions.[47] If, on the other hand, he uses it in such a broad sense that it has no resemblance

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[42] *GUF*, 121.
[43] *GUF*, 125 ff.
[44] In fact, Hick cites a long excerpt from the Council's 1964 constitution:
> "Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely see God and moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to His grace. Whatever goodness or truth is found among them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel" (Ch. ii, par. 16).

And another one from the closing Declaration in 1965:
> "The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets froth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men" (Par. 2) (Both cited in *GUF*, 125-26).

[45] *GUF*, 131.
[46] *GUF*, 132.
[47] Lipner, J, *"Does Copernicus Help? Reflections for a Christian Theology of Religions,"* Religious Studies 13, 1977, 253.

to any of the common notions of God in the world religions, then he is charged by D'Costa with arguing for "transcendental agnosticism."[48]

As another deficiency, Rose points out that Hick's theory "excludes nontheistic religions, such as many schools of Buddhism and Hinduism," and secular ideologies including Marxism, which according to D Forrester is closer to Christianity in its concerns than nontheistic Hinduism.

One can nevertheless argue that all of the critics miss one crucial point. Hick's point at this juncture was not the problem of inter-religious language[49] though that would be dealt with at a later stage. His main problem was to produce a sound theory to explain the apparent plurality of religions, which he seemed to have achieved.

Unlike non-realists such as Don Cupitt and D. Z. Phillips, despite his radical views, Hick has always wanted to and still does insist on remaining within the Christian circle, which poses an immense problem for liberal minded-philosophers of religion like Hick. As we have noted earlier, Hick believed that the most difficult problem against a possible theory of religious pluralism would come from the holy scriptures of the world religions. In the case of Christianity, one might suggest, the problem becomes more complex because of the unique position and role of Jesus, i.e. the doctrine of Incarnation, "whereby God is said to have been utterly and uniquely revealed in Jesus of Nazareth who was fully God and fully man."[50] Hick restates the problem in the introduction to *God and the Universe of Faiths:*

> "In this field the most difficult problem for the Christian is to reconcile his allegiance to the person of Christ, by whom he is irrevocably grasped, with his awareness of God's saving activity outside the borders of Christianity."[51]

Hick ironically remarked elsewhere that, like many others, he, too, started with a *high Christology* in 1958, when he scrutinised D M Baillie for "failing to express the full orthodox faith."[52] However, after fifteen years in academia, he went beyond Baillie, and adopted a *low Christology*. Regarding the potential problem with traditional Christianity, Hick states his argument as follows:

> "There is a direct line of logical entailment from the premise that Jesus was God, in the sense that he was God the Son, the Second Person of the Divine Trinity, living in a human life, to the conclusion that Christianity, and Christianity alone, was founded by God in person; and from this to the further conclusion that God must want all his human children to be related to him through this religion which he has himself founded for us; and then to the final

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[48] D'Costa, *John Hick's*, 170 ff., 184.
[49] By this, I mean the possibility of the great world religions sharing a common language, like that of the Real instead of God, as preferred by Hick in his mature work.
[50] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 89.
[51] *GUF*, xix.
[52] *GHMN*, 3 (See Hick, *"The Christology of D. M. Baillie,"* Scottish Journal of Theology 11, no. 1, 1958, 1-12, which was one of the first articles Hick published).

> conclusion, drawn in the Roman Catholic dogma 'Outside the Church, no salvation' and its Protestant missionary equivalent 'Outside Christianity, no salvation.'"[53]

To resolve the incompatibility between Incarnation and the Copernican revolution, Hick proposes a reconsideration of the traditional Christology from three perspectives: the world religions, philosophical criticisms and modern biblical scholarship. Hick has written three major articles on Incarnation. The first two have appeared as chapters 11 and 12 of *God and the Universe of Faiths*, "Christ and Incarnation"[54] and "Incarnation and Mythology."[55] The third, "Jesus and the World Religions," has come in one of his most controversial books, *The Myth of God Incarnate*.[56] Hick remains best-known in many academic circles as the editor of this book, which was taken as an offence against Christian orthodoxy.

In what follows, I shall try to summarise, without going into much detail, Hick's argument against the traditional Christology from three aspects. Since the critique of Hick's proposal will follow in the forthcoming chapter, I shall not attempt much criticism here.

3.3.1. The World Religions and the Incarnation

Deriving from Feuerbach's explanation of the notion of God as a "projection of human ideals," Hick points out the religious tendency to exalt a "human teacher into a divine figure of universal power."[57] The important objective here is drawn from a branch of Buddhism (Mahayana) and the religious mind, which Hick calls "subjective intentionality." Hick writes that despite the fact that the founder of Buddhism, Guatama (or Sakyamuni), was a historical being, who "made no claim to be divine" and only had "attained to *nirvana*- complete transcendence of egoism, and oneness with eternal trans-personal Reality," in Mahayana Buddhism, which was a contemporary development with Christianity, he "came to be revered as much more than an outstanding human individual."[58] They developed the doctrine of Three Bodies (*Trikaya*) of the Buddha: (1) "the earthly or incarnate body (*Nirmanakaya*)," (2) "the Body of Bliss (*Sambhogakaya*), a transcendent or heavenly Buddha" and (3) "the Dharma Body (*Dharmakaya*) which is Absolute Reality." Consequently, Hick talks of "Buddhology" as opposed to "Christology."[59] The similarity between the two, Hick contends, is that "in each case it led the developing tradition to speak of him in terms which he himself did not use, and to understand him by means of a complex of beliefs which was only gradually formed by later generations of his followers."[60]

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[53] D'Costa, *Hick's*, 49, (cited from *GHMN*, US edition, 58).
[54] *GUF*, 148-164.
[55] *GUF*, 165-179.
[56] For the controversy surrounding the book, including its provocative title, and the reactions it elicited, see *PRP*, 12-13.
[57] *MYGI*, 168; *GHMN*, 60.
[58] *MYGI*, 168-69; *GHMN*, 60-61.
[59] *MYGI*, 169; *GHMN*, 61.
[60] *MYGI*, 170; *GHMN*, 62.

At this stage, Hick also responds to a possible objection: *the Resurrection*, as the separating line between Jesus and the rest of humanity from a Christian perspective. Having dealt with several probabilities, Hick concludes that in the modern world of the twentieth century "it is less easy to accept stories of a physical resurrection, particularly when they refer to an event nearly twenty centuries ago and when the written evidence is in detail so conflicting and so hard to interpret."[61] He goes on to reason that even if a physical resurrection were to take place, it is highly unlikely that we should necessarily "regard it as a proof of divinity."[62]

Hick stretches his argument further with regard to "subjective intentionality," in stating that there is understandably a strong urge within the followers' psyche to transpose "*psychological* absolutes into *ontological* absolutes."[63] The momentous event of salvation sometimes forces the believer to doctrinise the exclusive validity of one's own experience. To illustrate his point, he gives the example of falling in love, of loyalty to a monarch or to one's country at a "non-religious" level, which are all genuine and may seem exclusive to the subject; however, this does not suggest that others' experiences are less genuine or that there cannot be other genuine experiences of the same sort. The case for any religion, Christianity in Hick's argument, is also clear. The overwhelming experience of being saved by Jesus does not entail that there cannot be other ways of salvation. Incarnation, thus, is a statement expressing the importance of Jesus for Christians only, not more than that.[64]

3.3.2. Philosophical Objections to the Incarnation

These objections mostly result from the critique of Incarnational language, which give us Hick's first move towards a mythological/metaphorical understanding of religious language. In the early stages of "Incarnation and Mythology," Hick asks:

> "What sort of language are we speaking when we affirm divine incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth? What is the logical character of such a proclamation?"[65]

He then bluntly answers the question that "the language is mythological," by which he emphasises the difference between "the language of theory or hypothesis" and of myth. "A theory, whether theological or scientific," Hick argues, is a "spelling out of a possible state of affairs such that if this state of affairs obtains some otherwise puzzling phenomenon

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[61] *MYGI*, 170-71; *GHMN*, 62-63.

[62] *MYGI*, 171; *GHMN*, 63. To bolster his argument, Hick quotes from George Caird:

> "Let us suppose that tomorrow you were confronted with irrefutable evidence that an acquaintance whom you had good reason to believe dead had been seen alive by reliable witnesses. You would certainly feel compelled to revise some of your ideas about science, but I doubt whether you would feel compelled to revise your ideas about God. I doubt whether you would conclude that your acquaintance was divine, or that a stamp of authenticity had been placed on all he ever said or did..." (Caird, G B, *"The Christological Basis of Christian Hope,"* in *The Christian Hope*, London: SPCK, 1970, 10).

[63] D'Costa, *Hick's*, 50.

[64] *GUF*, 173-74. Hick also appeals to E Troeltsch's theory, which asserts the psychological and cultural relativity of religions.

[65] *GUF*, 165.

ceases to be puzzling."[66] In order to be useful or serve any purpose, Hick demands the possibility of falsification and verifiability of theories or hypotheses "within human experience." Otherwise they are "meaningless," or "pointless."[67]

A myth, on the other hand, according to Hick's definition is a "story which is told which is not literally true, or an idea or image which is applied to something or someone but which does not literally apply, but which invites a particular attitude in its hearers."[68] The criteria for the truthfulness of a myth lies at the practical level, that is "the appropriateness of the attitude which it evokes."[69] Through myths, we relate ourselves to any puzzling phenomena or situation "without being able to explain it,"[70] i.e. falsification does not apply to myths.

Hick uses this understanding of myth to establish an analogy between the story of the fall of Adam and Eve and the Incarnation. He maintains that the Fall story is not literally true and therefore not intended to account for the beginning of life on earth, but serves to remind us that "our 'true' nature is good even though our actual state is bad, and may prompt us to seek to realise our 'true' nature. Thus the myth functions in a way close to that of moral exhortation."[71] Hick implies that incarnational language also should be construed in this analogous manner.

Hick tries to explain what has happened and might happen if the incarnational language is taken literally. He attempts to do this by the philosophical analysis of the incarnational language. He writes of the past:

> "Every attempt to specify further the idea that Jesus was both God and man has broken down. It seems impossible to take the thought of the God-Man beyond the phrase 'God-Man' and find any definite meaning or content to it. But this need not surprise us; for Incarnation is a mystery."[72]

Both the early (the Arian, Eutychian, Nestorian and Apollinarian) and modern (D M Baillie's 'paradox of grace' theory) attempts have made the mistake of treating a "religious myth" as a "theological theory" "by failing to take Christ's humanity, or his deity, seriously."[73] When both are taken seriously, he suggests, "we have a mystery instead of an explanation." Since there is no Kantian distinction at this stage, Hick had to be content with the "orthodox formulae" of Nicea and Chalcedon that "the idea of divine incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth is a mystery lying beyond human and not a concept that can be given a precise meaning."[74] In this wrong turn (from myth to theory or doctrine), he also blames

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[66] *GUF*, 165-66.
[67] *GUF*, 166. D'Costa thinks that by accepting this position, Hick assimilates theology to science (D'Costa, *Hick's*, 52).
[68] *GUF*, 166-67; *MYGI*, 178; cf. *AIR*, 248.
[69] *GUF*, 167.
[70] *GUF*, 166.
[71] *GUF*, 168.
[72] *GUF*, 170.
[73] *GUF*, 170-171.
[74] *GUF*, 171-172. D'Costa detects an ambiguity in Hick's attitude towards orthodoxy at this stage: See D'Costa, *Hick's*, 55.

the influence of Graeco-Roman culture on the early Christianity, because of its "static, all-or-nothing model; for something either is or is not composed of a given substance."[75] This static model produced the move "from a metaphorical son of God to a metaphysical God the Son, of the same substance as the Father within the triune Godhead."[76]

3.3.3. Biblical Criticism and the Incarnation

D'Costa rightly observes that before the publication of *The Myth of God Incarnate*, Hick paid little attention to biblical studies to support his arguments against the traditional understanding of Incarnation. He goes on to claim that Hick's use of biblical criticism is supplementary, "for the first two arguments, (world religions and philosophical), are decisive whatever the results of biblical criticism."[77]

Taking on board the "historical scepticism" initiated by Bultmann and others like him, Hick draws our attention to the following points: firstly the availability and viability of the first-hand information about Jesus' life and teaching is almost non-existent. Secondly it is very difficult to establish a tenable traditional Christology at a time when we "come to acknowledge our ignorance of his inner life and thoughts."[78] We observe Hick refusing to give in to a "Bultmannian exit"[79] and taking his scepticism a step further. Thus he vehemently opposes the doctrine of Incarnation at the personal level of Jesus and of his early disciples when he states that "it is extremely unlikely that Jesus thought of himself, or that his first disciples thought of him, as God incarnate. He used the mysterious title Son of Man, the meaning of which to this day is uncertain."[80] As D'Costa puts it, "the titles ascribed to Jesus cannot carry the weight of later 'traditional' interpretation."[81] As to the Trinitarian theology of the New Testament and especially of St John's high Christology, Hick once again leans on some New Testament scholars' findings. To them, these absolutist passages are to be considered a "profound theological meditation in dramatic form, expressing a Christian interpretation of Jesus which was formed... fairly late in the first century."[82] Therefore, the Christological sayings such as "I and the Father are one, No one comes to the Father but by me, He who has seen me has seen the Father"[83] could not be properly ascribed to Jesus himself.

Hick's aim from this historical clarification and elaboration was to put a clear-cut line between "the Christ event" and "the (early?) church." What was happening was then an interpretation of the event by the Church which was not "part of that event itself." As a consequence, the whole exclusivist theological package as it is known to Christians now

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[75] *GUF*, 116.
[76] *MYGI*, 176.
[77] *GUF*, 57.
[78] *GUF*, 114.
[79] D'Costa, *Hick's*, 58.
[80] *GUF*, 114.
[81] D'Costa, *Hick's*, 58.
[82] *MYGI*, 171.
[83] *MYGI*, 171.

was not taught by Jesus, but was rather a product deduced from the Christ-event under certain geographical, sociological and psychological conditions by the early Church. Once the climate of the early Christianity was cleared up, Hick drew the early picture:

> "What seems to have happened during the hundred years or so following Jesus' death was that the language of divine sonship floated loose from the original ground of Jewish thought and developed a new meaning as it took root again in Graeco-Roman culture."[84]

If Jesus' role is relativised drastically as one of the central tenets of Christianity, then the question arises: what remains? Hick outlines his understanding of "the essence of Christianity":

> "Christianity is an ongoing movement of life and thought, defined by its origin in the Christ-event and by its consciousness of that origin. It cannot be defined in terms of adherence to any doctrinal standard, for its doctrines are historically and culturally conditioned and have changed as the church has entered new historical and cultural situations... Christian belief consists in the beliefs of Christians, and the Christians of one age cannot legislate for the Christians of another age, either past or future. Christianity then is an open-ended history which has taken varying forms in varying circumstances, and which has as its essence the way of salvation that was initiated by the Christ-event."[85]

The gist of Hick's argument is that as far as Christianity's relation to other religions is concerned, we have witnessed a journey from exclusivism to inclusivism through new interpretations of the doctrines. Now is the time for a new consideration and for pluralism.

Hick's liberal approach even to the central doctrines of Christianity and his attitude of not recognising any sort of authority drew fierce criticism from different angles. However, the criticism, as expected, has led Hick to develop his theory further and refine his ideas elegantly within a philosophical framework. This meant that he had to delve into the problems deeper throughout the 80s. The result was his *Philosophy of Religions*.

3.4. A Philosophy of Religions

Hick's first response to criticisms came in 1980 with the publication of "Toward a Philosophy of Religious Pluralism,"[86] in which he showed the first signs of his Kantian tendency and attempted to form a *philosophy* in contrast to a *theology* of religions. Hick's first concern in this article was to clarify his usage of the term God. He willingly concedes that it is inadequate as a generic term to embrace the religious experiences of all the great world religions, but nevertheless he goes on stating that the seemingly less limiting terms such as *the Transcendent, the Absolute, Brahman,* etc. are not "fully tradition-neutral or tradition-transcending." Therefore, if one wishes to use a term to refer to the divine reality, one has to "use a term provided by a particular tradition." Hence, he explains that

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[84] *GUF*, 116.
[85] *GUF*, 119.
[86] The article appeared first in *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 22, no. 2, 1980, 131-149 and reprinted in 1982 as a separate chapter (6) in the American edition of *GHMN*.

> "as a Christian I shall accordingly use the word 'god,' but I shall not use it in a straightforwardly theistic sense. There is of course the danger that either the writer or the reader may slip back, without noticing it, into the standard [theistic] use of the term; and both must be vigilant against this. I shall ... speak of God, but with the important proviso that it is an open question at this stage whether, and if so in what sense, God is personal... God is neither a person or a thing, but is the transcendent reality which is conceived and experienced by different human mentalities in both personal and impersonal ways."[87]

This revised use of the term God was not enough for critics. Consequently, by 1981 with a new article, entitled "Religious Pluralism and Absolute Claims,"[88] Hick moved beyond the conventional Christian language and furthered his Copernican revolution by shifting from a *theocentric* model to a *Reality-centred* model, which "centres upon the divine Reality; and Christianity is seen as one of a number of worlds of faith which circle around and reflect that Reality."[89]

From then on, Hick tried to find a neutral term to replace *God.* Among the available terms like "the Transcendent, the Ultimate, Ultimate Reality, the Supreme Principle, the Divine, the One, the Eternal, the Eternal One, the Real," he seemed to have favoured "the Transcendent, the Divine, and the Eternal One." However, he thought that the latter two were "too theistically coloured," and as a result rejected them. Despite the fact that the former, "the Transcendent," remained a possible option, he preferred to use "the Real" and, for "stylistic" purposes, synonymously "'the ultimately Real' and 'ultimate Reality' or even simply 'the Ultimate' or 'Reality.'"[90]

To bolster this choice of "the Real," Hick contends that it has the double advantage of both objectivity, i.e. not being possessed exclusively by any tradition, and of familiarity within all traditions. He asserts that from a Christian perspective, *the Real* is synonymous with God as the "sole self-existent reality." Within Islam, he appeals to *al-Haqq* as one of the names of Allah, which literally means *the real* though not within as broad a context as Hick uses it; within Hinduism, to "Brahman, as *sat* or *satya,* the Real"; within Mahayana Buddhism to "Dharmakaya or *sunyata*" as "*tattva,* the Real" and finally, within Chinese religious tradition, to *zhen* as the "ultimate, the Real." He concludes that the Real is "as good a generic name as we have for that which is affirmed in the varying forms of transcendent religious belief."[91]

Does this go far enough though to meet the objections? Apparently not; even this would neither silence the critics nor resolve the fundamental question at the heart of the

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[87] *GHMN* (US edition), 91.
[88] It was presented first in 1981 in series of colloquia on cultural pluralism and religious belief held by the Boston University Institute for Philosophy and Religion and printed in 1984 in the collection of essays in *Religious Pluralism*, edited by L Rouner, (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1984), as volume 5 of the Boston University Studies in Philosophy and Religion. Rose (*Knowing the Real*, 70) is mistaken in taking the publication date of the book (1984) as the first appearance of the article in academia (1981), which contradicts the statement by Hick in the preface of *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (*PRP*, x), of which the article constituted the 6th chapter.
[89] *PRP*, 53.
[90] *AIR*, 10-11.
[91] *AIR*, 11.

Copernican revolution- "that of determining the nature of the postulated centre of the universe of faiths."[92] This move was already well anticipated by Julius Lipner in his 1984 essay, "Does Copernicus Help?" He wrote then:

> "And even if Hick extends the notion of God to embrace such concepts as 'Absolute,' Transcendent,' etc. the force of the preceding objections is not met. He will still either have to reckon with the vagueness of such a comprehensive notion, or pack it with the flesh and blood of particular and mutually divergent religious conceptions. The process will still imply a contradiction between the approach employed and the objective sought; and some important religious traditions will just not fit into the picture... Nor will it do, of course, to insist that it is not intended to stress any *concept* of 'God' or 'The Absolute' or whatever in this reconstructed theology, but the *reality* underlying this concept. For all the old objections crop up again."[93]

We have briefly mentioned these objections in the closing lines of the previous section. To emphasise it once more: the problems with *God* remain with *the Absolute* or *the Real*, i.e. "either the understanding of these terms will be too broad (indeterminate with respect to theistic and nontheistic conceptions) or too narrow (asserting a specific theistic or nontheistic conception)."[94]

Can Hick fully answer these terminological charges? He tries to do so in the complete version of his philosophy of religions, though that solution brings further criticisms which we shall deal with at length in the forthcoming chapter. In short, Hick's response to these objections is the ineffability of *the Real an sich*, the noumenal Real. He defines *ineffable* as "having a nature that is beyond the scope of our networks of human concepts."[95] Thus the Real in itself, Hick writes,:

> "cannot properly be said to be personal or impersonal, purposive or non-purposive, good or evil, substance or process, even one or many. However, in denying, for example, that the Real is personal one is not thereby saying that it is impersonal, but rather that this conceptual polarity or dualism does not apply. And the same with the other dualisms. This does not, however, mean that the Real is to be postulated as nothing, or a blank, but rather as a reality lying outside the scope of our human conceptual systems."[96]

Here, Hick quickly addresses two possible objections. He firstly warns the reader that the ineffability of the Real in itself does not entail the conclusion that "we cannot characterise it at all, even in purely formal ways;"[97] for the very claim of ineffability already makes a characteristic statement, i.e. the Real is ineffable. Rather it means, Hick avers, that "we cannot properly attribute intrinsic qualities to it."[98] However, this does not suggest that it is an "empty blank; it means that its nature, infinitely rich in itself, cannot be expressed in

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[92] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 71.
[93] Lipner, *"Does Copernicus Help?"*, 254.
[94] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 71.
[95] *ROF*, 27.
[96] *ROF*, 27-28.
[97] *ROF*, 28.
[98] *ROF*, 28.

our human concepts."[99] Secondly, it cannot be construed from the ineffability of the Real in itself that "we can say nothing significant about it." For, in contrast to naturalistic explanations, we claim that there must be a "transcendent Reality," "if human religious experience is not purely human projection but, whilst involving projection, is at the same time a response to a transcendent Reality."[100] For Hick, this constitutes the crucial distinction between a naturalistic and a religious interpretation of religion. If there were only one religion in the world, say Buddhism, it would be possible to identify the Real, without the distinction of *in itself* and *as humanly experienced*, with the theology of Buddhism. But since there are "several world religions which seem to be soteriologically more or less on a par," it would be wrong methodologically, in a religious interpretation of religion, to identify the Real with the "intentional object of any one of them to the exclusion of the others."[101] Hence it is necessary to make a distinction between "the Real as it is in itself and the Real as variously thought and experienced within the different major traditions."[102]

Before examining how Hick utilises Kantian philosophical terms, I would like to deal with a possible problem Hick faces. He makes the hypothetical suggestion that if there were one religion in the world, it would be possible to identify the Real with the theology of that religion. If one takes this further, it becomes quite problematic from several aspects. One is the Kantian dimension according to which even though, for example, there is one moon, the Kantian distinction still applies, as the moon in itself and as perceived by the human thought, i.e. these two will be radically different. The second point goes against Hick's understanding of religious language, which, he claims, is mythical and does not represent the Real in itself. But in his hypothetical suggestion, he appears to be saying that the Real can be described in our terms, human language. The third problem is the fact that Hick uses the distinction not as a necessity of his concept of Real, or of religious language or of religious experience, but because of the apparent plurality of human religious experience.[103] This makes his hypothesis more vulnerable to criticism than otherwise. It seems to me that his understanding of religious language and of religious experience should have led him to declare the necessary distinction between the Real in itself and as humanly experienced and thought even if there were one religion in the world.

Having made this preliminary note, we can proceed to study one of the most controversial and hotly-debated parts of the pluralistic hypothesis: its use of *Kant's First Critique* as a basic epistemological model for the distinction, i.e. *the noumenal world* and *the phenomenal world*. The underlying assumption in Hick's hypothesis is the view that

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[99] *ROF*, 28.
[100] *ROF*, 28.
[101] *ROF*, 28.
[102] *ROF*, 28.
[103] Another dimension to this discussion is the differences of both opinions and experiences regarding the Real even in one religion, as happens in Islam, to my knowledge. So, the very otherness of the Real would necessitate such a distinction: the Real in itself and as humanly experienced and thought.

"what is perceived is always partly constructed by the perceiver."[104] In other words, "the mind actively interprets sensory information in terms of concepts, so that the environment as we consciously perceive and inhabit it is our familiar three-dimensional world of objects interacting in space."[105]

As we have noted earlier, while developing his philosophy of religions throughout the 1980s, Hick has undergone substantial changes from being a Christian theologian, trying to determine the place of Christianity in the universe of faiths, to becoming a philosopher of religion, trying to understand the relationship between religions and their postulated ground by using an analogy from Kantian epistemology.

Before going on to explore the Kantian connotations related to his philosophy of religions, Hick draws our attention to a similar principle stated by Thomas Aquinas long before Kant: "Things known are in the knower according to the mode of the knower" (S. T. II/II, Q 1. art. 2).[106] Aquinas applies this principle to show that even though "God *a se* is simple and undifferentiated, God can only be known by human beings through complex propositions."[107] Hick applies the same principle to the epistemology of religion to argue that, given that faith acts as an interpretive element in our relation to our awareness of the environment we live in, with regard to the divine, the difference, constituted within different "religio-cultural" frameworks, in the "mode of the knower" results in the thought and experience of the Real in a variety of ways in different cultures.[108] He also quotes the Muslim Sufi thinker Junaid al-Baghdadi to exemplify the polarity of perceiving the Real: "The water takes its colour from the vessel containing it."[109]

Hick suggests that although the Thomist maxim makes a good start in establishing a "pluralistic epistemology of religion", the Kantian distinction of *noumenon* and

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[104] *ROF*, 29.

[105] *AIR*, 240. In another context, Hick writes of Kant and his epistemology highly appreciatively: "It was above all Immanuel Kant who brought this realisation into the stream of modern reflection, and it has since been confirmed and amplified by innumerable studies, not only in general epistemology but also in cognitive psychology, in the sociology of knowledge, and in the philosophy of science. The central fact, of which the epistemology of religion also has to take account, is that our environment is not reflected in our consciousness in a simple and straightforward ways, just as it is, independently of our perceiving it" (*PRP*, 40).

[106] *AIR*, 240-41; *ROF*, 29.

[107] *AIR*, 241.

[108] *AIR*, 241; *ROF*, 29.

[109] *AIR*, 241; Nicholson, R A, *The Mystics of Islam*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963, 88. The quotation actually forms part of a longer extract from Ibn Arabi, another Sufi-scholar, which advocates more freely for religious pluralism. Ibn Arabi states:

> "Those who adore God in the sun behold the sun, and those who adore Him in living things see a living thing, and those who adore Him in lifeless thing, and those who adore Him as a Being unique and unparalleled see that which has no like. Do not attach yourself to any particular creed exclusively, so that you disbelieve all the rest; otherwise, you will lose much good, nay, you will fail to recognise the real truth of the matter. God, the omnipresent and omnipotent, is not limited by any one creed, for He says 'Wheresoever ye turn, there is the face of Allah' (*The Qur'an*, 2:109). Every one praises what he believes; his god is his own creature, and in praising it he praises himself. Consequently he blames the beliefs of others, which he would not do if he were just, but his dislike is based on ignorance. If he knew Junayd's saying, 'The water takes its colour from the vessel containing it,' he would not interfere with other men's beliefs, but would perceive God in every form of belief' (Nicholson, 87-88. Unfortunately, Nicholson does not give the original source from which he quotes Ibn Arabi).

phenomenon in the analysis of the perception of sense objects could serve as a better philosophical basis for a religious theory explaining the different perceptions of the Real throughout the world religions.[110] However, he tries to do this in an area totally alien to the Kantian epistemology: the epistemology of religion.[111] Because of this remoteness between the two epistemologies, Rose characterises Hick's model as "quasi-Kantian."[112] In addition to the distinction of noumenon and phenomenon, Hick also uses other Kantian conceptions such as "experience-constituting categories and temporal schematization of these categories."[113] With all this help from the Kantian epistemology, Hick offers a hypothesis that accounts both for the "cognitivity and the diversity of religious claims and worldviews,"[114] while avoiding both scepticism and particularism.

3.4.1. The Noumenon/Phenomenon Distinction

The basic assumption underlying Hick's pluralist hypothesis is that the Real *an sich*, the noumenal Real, is thought and experienced differently in different religious traditions, the phenomenal Real. Hick argues:

> "Thus, we must distinguish between the world as it is in itself, unperceived, and that same world as humanly perceived. For example, what I am conscious of as the continuous, brown, hard, heavy surface of my desk, which makes a sound when I bang it, is, according to physicists, a region of mostly empty space within which infinitesimally minute packets of discharging energy are moving about at immense speed. These 'particles' -currently identified as 'quarks'- do not have colour, weight, hardness, sound, or fixed position. But for a human perceiver, located where we are on the macro-micro scale and endowed with our particular kind of perceptual machinery and conceptual systems, the physical world appears as it does. It must be something very different for a microbe, or a horse, or a bird, or a fish. We therefore have to distinguish, as Immanuel Kant did, between a thing as it is in itself [noumenon] and that thing as humanly perceived -that is, as phenomenon... If, then, it is a general truth about the human mind that we become aware of our environment and are able to act and react appropriately within it through a continuous interpretive activity, this will also be true of religious awareness."[115]

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[110] One can surely question Hick's evaluation of both the Thomist and the Kantian principles. Even though Hick represents them as sort of quasi-pluralists, neither was in fact pluralist in anything like Hick's sense. As we shall see in the following chapter, when this is pointed out by several critics Hick immediately goes out of the Kantian circle to suggest that: i. he is aware that this is an extension to which Kant would have objected (*AIR*, 242-244), ii. he takes only one part of the Kantian philosophy and applies it to religious epistemology not the whole of it, and iii. one is entitled to do these type of moves within one's own philosophy.

[111] Hick is, nevertheless, not the first scholar to apply the Kantian epistemology to the philosophy of religion. As a well-known early case in point, he speaks of Rudolf Otto in the way Otto explains the concept of the holy as an *a priori* category of human mind (See for more, Otto, R, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. Harvey, J H, London, Oxford and New York: OUP, 1981, p. 144-45). As a more recent example and a closer one to Hick's usage, he quotes Robert Oakes' article: *"Noumena, Phenomena, and God,"*. International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 14, no. 1, 1973.

[112] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 72.

[113] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 72; *AIR*, 245-49.

[114] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 72.

[115] Hick, *"A Pluralist View,"* 46-47.

The Kantian resemblance is obvious from the concepts. To be able to understand fully what is meant by the terms, it is worth considering in what context Kant uses these two terms, noumenon and phenomenon. Kant states in his *First Critique:*

> "If we entitle certain objects, as appearances, sensible entities (phenomena), then since we thus distinguish the mode in which we intuit them from the nature that belongs to them in themselves, it is implied in this distinction that we place the latter, considered in their own nature, although we do not so intuit them, or that we place other possible things, which are not objects of our sense but are thought as objects merely through the understanding, in opposition to the former, and that in so doing we entitle the intelligible entities (noumena)."[116]

In other words, Kant contends that "by 'noumenon' we mean a thing so far as it is *not an object of our sensible intuition*, and so abstract from our mode of intuiting it."[117]

Relying on the Kantian concepts, Hick contends that despite the fact that "we cannot speak of the Real *an sich* in literal terms,"[118] on a relational level we "inescapably" live quite close to it. Therefore, our senses and the mind/brain are affected by this "environing reality," though it can never be "known, experienced, or described in itself."[119] For Hick, this environing reality is the *Real an sich* (or the noumenal Real) and the different ways in which it is thought and experienced is in *phenomena* (or the phenomenal Real). In Hick's words, the Real is

> "experienced by human beings, but experienced in a manner analogous to that in which, according to Kant, we experience the world: namely by informational input from external reality being interpreted by the mind in terms of its own categorical scheme and thus coming to consciousness as meaningful phenomenal experiences. All that we are entitled to say about the noumenal source of this information is that it is the reality whose influence produces, in collaboration with the human mind, the phenomenal world of our experience."[120]

The strikingly radical difference between the Kantian epistemology and Hick's adaptation of it is that Hick extends its usage beyond sensory experience to analyse religious experience or our religious awareness of the Real; this is an extension which Hick is aware Kant would have objected to.[121] Hick justifies his position by emphasising that Kant:

> "was solely concerned, in his discussion of the categories, with the construction of the physical world in sense perception. One who is concerned with the construction of the divine within religious experience has the option of accepting or rejecting Kant's view of sense perception. One theory neither requires nor is incompatible with the other. We have already noted that Kant's own epistemology of religion was quite unrelated to his understanding of sense perception. But this fact does not bar others, inspired by his basic insights, from seeing

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116 Kant, I, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B306 (Smith, 267).
117 Kant, I, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B307 (Smith, 268).
118 *AIR*, 351.
119 Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 73.
120 *AIR*, 243.
121 *AIR*, 242-44.

religious and sense experience as continuous in kind, thereby extending Kant's analysis of the one, in an appropriately adapted form, to the other."[122]

Although, I shall be engaging in a detailed criticism of Hick's proposal in the following chapter, let me highlight a few preliminary difficulties about this distinction. It seems to me that there is a puzzling link between the God of Kant and the noumenal Real of Hick: both are postulated, the former as a presupposition of moral life and the latter as a presupposition of religious life. Hick's claim that the Real is experienced phenomenally by different human beings through different categories on different levels may seem to be plausible. But when taken to the noumenal level and pressed hard, Hick's argument may be shown to be self-defeating. To put it bluntly, Hick acknowledges that the Real is ineffable and cannot be spoken of as having any attributes apart from formal ones such as that it exists. However, how can one be sure, in the first place, that it exists if it is unknowable? This is self-defeating. Furthermore, Hick also admits that he postulates the Real to differ from naturalistic explanations that religious experiences are not in toto delusory. But, once again, how does one know for sure that the religious experiences of human beings refer to the Real that Hick postulates? Lastly, if it is a postulated Real, how different is it from Kant's postulated God? Hick responds to this question by saying that it is postulated "as a pre-supposition, not of the moral life, but of religious experience and religious life."[123] Hick takes the argument one step further to suggest that, considering his position in his three *Critiques*, Kant would not have rejected the idea that we can experience God as phenomenon different from divine noumenon. There are two dimensions of this problem. One is whether Kant would have accepted the noumenal / phenomenal concept of God/Real. It seems to me that he would not have.[124] The other is a point we discussed earlier when examining Hick's theory of *religion as family-resemblance* where he included Marxists and Humanists within the framework of religion despite their very opposition to the phenomenon of religion. There I argued that Hick's claim for their actions as being religious was "wishful thinking," in his terms. Here too the same charge may be applied to Hick. This is because Kant's God is not a "reality," Hick concedes, "encountered in religious experience but an object postulated by reason on the basis of its own practical functioning in moral agency."[125] It does not seem to me plausible, then, to claim that religious experience represents the phenomenal Real on the human level. Therefore Hick's

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[122] *AIR*, 244.
[123] *AIR*, 243.
[124] However, one should bear in mind that, probably, because of the obscurity of Kant's philosophy, there can be found contradicting materials on this issue. On the one hand, A Race, for example, suggests that Kant did not believe that "God could be experienced, even as divine phenomenon" (Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 86). Beryl Logan, on the other hand, uses a distinction very similar to Hick's, though not to support the conclusion of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, which seems to contradict Race's conclusion. She maintains that "God as a thing-in-itself is unknowable" and what we do is think and talk about God in our own terms. But our language does not apply to God as a thing-in-itself (p. 138-39). This is as far as Logan takes the distinction, which we shall return shortly at more length. See for more: Logan, *"Hume and Kant on knowing the deity,"* International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 43, 1998, 133-148.
[125] *AIR*, 242.

argument fails. We shall come back to this issue in the next chapter where an extended critique of religious pluralism will be offered.[126]

There can, however, be found an intersection line between Hick's philosophy of religions and the Kantian epistemology, that is the way in which the link is established between noumenon and phenomenon. Both share a relational attitude in proving the probability of God as a *thing-in-itself* / the noumenal Real. I shall start with the Kantian concept. In *Kant's First Critique and the Transcendental Deduction,* F C White argues that:

> "Kant is not a subjective idealist or pure phenomenalist. For, although he holds that knowledge of reality in itself is impossible, he asserts that the world as it appears cannot be all there is; it must be the appearance of something beyond it. In other words, there must be a thing in itself, a *Ding an sich.*"[127]

For the following lines in examining the Kantian position, I shall mostly rely on an article, "*Hume and Kant on Knowing the Deity,*" by Beryl Logan. In a preface to the second edition of *Critique of Pure Reason, CPR,*[128] Kant makes a distinction between *"thinking* an object and *knowing* an object." He asserts that although "we cannot know these objects as things in themselves, we must yet be in a position at least to *think* them as things in themselves."[129] If this were not the case, i.e. we were unable to think of things in themselves as things in themselves, "'we should be landed in the absurd conclusion that there can be appearances [*phenomena*] without anything that appears [*noumena*]'."[130] Logan quotes Kant from *CPR*:

> "To *know* an object I must be able to prove its possibility, either from its actuality as attested by experience, or *a priori* by means of reason. But I can *think* whatever I please, provided ... my concept is a possible thought.' (That is, it contains no contradictions.) Thinking an object 'does not answer for there being ... an object corresponding to it' (*CPR*, B xxvii)... While we *think* the possibility of such a Being, we are not 'merely inventing' it, as it would be absurd to claim that there are connections in the world of the senses without there being a cause of those connections. So we look 'beyond the boundary' of what we *can* know (the objects of possible experience), to *think* the idea of a Supreme Being, but anything we may say about that Being can only be accomplished by analogy."[131]

The analogy is what Kant calls, *"symbolic* anthropomorphism," which "'concerns language only and not the object itself.' It is a way of thinking and talking about the Deity that reflects the relationship between the sensible world and the Deity without purporting to describe the Deity."[132] Logan continues:

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[126] For more on Kant's distinction of noumenal and phenomenal worlds and how that relates to his concept of God, see: Smith, N K, *A Commentary to Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason'*, London: Macmillan, 1930; White, F C, *Kant's First Critique and the Transcendental Deduction*, Aldershot-Brookfield, USA: Avebury, 1996.
[127] White, *Kant's First Critique*, 4.
[128] Subsequently, I will use this abbreviation for Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason.*
[129] Logan, *"Hume and Kant,"* 138, White, *Kant's First Critique*, 5.
[130] Logan, *"Hume and Kant,"* 138.
[131] Logan, *"Hume and Kant,"* 138.
[132] Logan, *"Hume and Kant,"* 138.

"This symbolic anthropomorphism is established by an analogical argument that is relational rather than descriptive, i.e. it intends to establish similar relations between items, not to describe the items. It does not allow us to have knowledge of a thing-in-itself, something which Kant believes we are unable to do, but it does allow us to think and talk about the Deity through terms and relations that are within the scope of our knowledge; we are describing what our experience is like for us and speaking about God in those terms that are knowable by us. When we speak of, and reason about, God in these terms, we are not describing what God is like nor are we drawing any conclusions about God as God as a thing-in-itself. God as a thing-in-itself is unknowable as a *thing-in-itself*...

Making this relational claim does not infer that the Deity is or is not intelligent, or if it is intelligent that the Deity's intelligence is anything like human intelligence. It only 'determine[s] it as regards the [sensible] world and therefore as regard ourselves.' When we speak of the world as being intelligently ordered, we say much about ourselves in the world of phenomena when *we speak* of God being in a relation (one we can understand) to us like the relation of parent and child, but we say nothing *of* God. The 'predicates' that we attribute to God in this way are thus determined subjectively - for us and by us. They are not determined objectively -this is what God is like- as is the case in the 'standard' argument."[133]

When one reads these lines, one can easily recognise the similarities between Hick and Kant. Even though Logan does not seem to be aware of Hick's application of Kantian epistemology to his philosophy of religions, Kant's God as a thing-in-itself and Hick's noumenal Real look very similar in that i) both are ineffable and ii) in both the Kantian and the Hickian conceptions of the Real, religious language is not descriptive but expresses our understanding in our own terms.[134]

Then comes the important agreement: despite the unknowability of Kant's God as a thing-in-itself and Hick's noumenal Real, they both agree that it could be thought of relationally. To Kant, "though, while reason is limited to objects of possible experience, its limits are only boundaries beyond which lie things in themselves," where, he thinks, we can establish a connection "between possible experience and the Deity as a thing in itself." This relation must exist, Kant insists, to avoid the absurd conclusion that "there can be appearances [*phenomena*] without anything that appears [*noumena*]."[135] But this relation stays always at the thought level of human beings, in Kant's understanding, which means that our thought of a being does not always guarantee that there exists a being to correspond to it. Hick, agreeing with Kant, as a *critical realist*, takes the matter one step further, to suggest that although at the noumenal level the Real cannot be known and experienced, it is capable of being experienced and thought at the phenomenal level, which is what we can see throughout the great world religions. Hick replaces Kant's absurdity claim by the suggestion that religious experiences of human beings cannot be 'in toto

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[133] Logan, *"Hume and Kant,"* 138-139.
[134] *AIR*, 244-49.
[135] Logan, *"Hume and Kant,"* 138.

illusory.' What, then, is the guarantee that the supposedly religious experiences might be related to the Kantian God as a thing-in-itself and Hick's noumenal Real? I would say it is not very strong. That is why we see Kant proposing *autonomous morality* , duty for the sake of duty,[136] and Hick suggesting *the religious neutrality of the universe,* which means our experiences of the Real could be interpreted either way: religiously and non-religiously.[137]

The discussion gives us the following diagram, which operates horizontally:

The Kantian Picture		*The Hickian Picture*
God as a thing-in-itself	------->	The noumenal Real
Human beings' experiences (God talk)	------->	Religious experiences and their expression
God as a religious phenomenon	------->	The phenomenal Real[138]

3.4.2. Categories: God and the Absolute

How, then, do we receive the information and form our picture of the physical and religious worlds? In his summary of Kant's proposal, Hick suggest that "informational input from external reality," the noumenal world, is "interpreted by the mind in terms of its own categorical scheme and thus coming to consciousness and meaningful *phenomenal*[139] experience."[140] Kant calls the medium used in the emergence of phenomenal experience "categories of understanding" which are "*a priori* and hence universal and invariable."[141] Hick writes:

> "The pure categories or pure concepts of the understanding (for example, substance) are schematised in terms of temporality to produce the more concrete categories which are exhibited in our actual experience of the world. (Thus, for example, the pure concept of substance is schematised as the more concrete idea of an object enduring through time). The impact of our environment upon our sensory equipment then comes to consciousness in forms prescribed by these schematised categories."[142]

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[136] Logan, *"Hume and Kant,"* 145.

[137] Thus, we frequently come across passages like this: "not that we believe in God because He exists, but rather that He exists because we believe in Him" which, following Karl Popper's analysis, suggests that among other things, God is also a creation of human mind and belongs to world 3, being the "world of actual or possible objects of thought" (Medawar, P, *The Limits of Science*, Oxford and New York: OUP, 1986, 94-95).

[138] Rose offers a slightly different diagram:

"The Noumenal Divine Real -----> Independent of Religious Experience
Categories: God, the Absolute -----> General Structure of Religious Experience
Schematization: (Im)Personae -----> Religious Experience in the Traditions"

Rose points out that the relationship between the first, the noumenal Real, and the second, categories, stages of the diagram is "obscure" and describes it as an "illusory solution" (*Knowing the Real*, 76-77). D'Costa also gives a similar diagram of Hick's philosophy of religions. See, D'Costa, *Hick's*, 160.

[139] Italics are mine.

[140] *AIR*, 243.

[141] *AIR*, 243.

[142] *AIR*, 243.

Hick asserts that the same principle applies to "our awareness of the Real," though with striking differences. Hick's "hyper-Kantianism"[143] proposes, by going beyond the Kantian borders, that "the categories of religious experience[144] are not universal and invariable but are on the contrary culture-relative." More surprisingly, "it is possible to live without employing them; and when they are employed they tend to affect the development of human consciousness."[145] What is left of Kantian epistemology in Hick's hyper-Kantian system? To my mind very little and this makes Hick's job difficult. If we had put this to Kant, he would definitely have objected to the idea, something which Hick also admits. How can Hick still adhere to this idea, if it is neither universal, nor invariable, nor indispensable or inescapable, and moreover, culturally relative contrary to Kantian universality? As we have seen earlier, Hick basically responds that his and Kant's agendas were different and, therefore, he had "the option of accepting or rejecting Kant's view of sense perception."[146]

Having established this, Hick deals with two questions: i) "the postulated presence of the Real to the human life" and ii) "the cognitive structure of our consciousness."[147] With regard to the first, he brings in different proposals from recent information theory. Among them are the transformation of information from a "transcendent source to the human mind/brain and its transformation by the mind/brain into conscious experience" and of "mind-to-mind and matter-to-mind." Hick maintains that "the presence of the Real consists in the availability, from a transcendent source, of information that the human mind/brain is capable of transforming into what we call religious experience."[148] As to the structure of our awareness of the Real, Hick suggests analogously that in the physical world we use two categories. One is the "concept of God, or of the Real as personal," which we witness in various theistic religions and the other is "the concept of the Absolute, or of the Real as non-personal," which is represented in various ways in non-theistic forms.[149]

Since the categories are universal in Kant's understanding, we do not seem to face the problem of diversity which Hick is trying to resolve. Hick's theory lacks the very guarantee of Kant's: the universality (and hence 'objectivity) of the knowledge or of our perception of the world. One can always ask: which comes first or which determines which? Is it the categories that determine our understanding of the world and of the religious phenomena or vice versa? Kant thinks that despite the fact we cannot know things

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143 This is the name given by J William Forgie to describe the position of Hick's and the like-minded thinkers K Garside and S Katz. Forgie defines "hyper-Kantianism" as a "view which, though broadly Kantian in inspiration, goes beyond Kant and assigns to non-categories, e.g. non-universally shared beliefs and concepts, a casual role in determining the phenomenological content of experience." (Forgie, J W, *"Hyper-Kantianism in Recent Discussions of Mystical Experience,"* Religious Studies 21, no 2, 1985, 208).

144 Forgie calls them "category-analogues" since he does not reckon them as categories in the Kantian sense (Forgie, *"Hyper-Kantianism,"* 208).

145 *AIR*, 243-44.

146 *AIR*, 244.

147 *AIR*, 244.

148 *AIR*, 244.

149 *AIR*, 245.

in themselves as they are, since the categories are universal, such is our knowledge or perception of the world. In other words, because the input and the structure of our minds are the same, we all have the same output of universal knowledge. Hick and some other like-minded constructivists, such as S Katz, put more emphasis on categories; couched in computing language, we perform, perceive, categorise and schematise the input according to the way we are programmed by culture and society. Hence the different conceptions of the noumenal Real exist at the phenomenal level. Put another way, is it the Real that causes diversity in religious traditions, or our religio-cultural programmes? Hick would suggest that our programmes, categories, etc. are the causes of diversity, because the categories are not universal and invariable and culture-relative. To me, the matter could be witnessed not only at a religious level but also at a physical level, which gives the Kantian epistemology a further twist. A typical example of this sort could be found among some Sufi groups in the Islamic world.[150] These are well established and still popular mystics who, during some divine ecstatic experience, experiment with lethal objects like knives and skewers (sometimes on live television programmes) and even though they cut themselves, they neither bleed nor need stitches for the wounds. As soon as they are finished, they act as if nothing has happened. How are we to understand these sorts of phenomena? It is a well-known fact that when one is cut, one bleeds from the wound and it needs to be taken care of immediately to prevent death due to loss of blood. These simple facts do not seem to apply to the Sufis. William J Forgie asserts that the Kantian categories are "inescapable" and we can only "experience the world in terms of cause and effect, and substance and attribute," if we can experience it at all.[151] Why does the cause-effect relationship not appear to work in case of the Sufis? Two answers come immediately to mind: one is that one of the parties, either the Sufis or the observers, could be mistaken in witnessing the event or some say it could be magic, etc. Since neither of these could be a viable explanation due to the number of the observers and of the frequency of the practices taking place, there follows the second option. This is that different categories can cause different causal relationships and result in different perceptions of the same phenomenon, even though Kant might not have accepted this explanation. Hence it is possible in the case of religious experience that different mind-sets cause or result in different perceptions of the same noumenal Real.[152]

What justifies the universality of our knowledge of the world? In Kantian terms, do we say the categories are the same because the knowledge, the end result, is the same or the end result is the same because the categories are the same? Which is the cause and which the effect? To me, categories are the causes and our universal knowledge of the world is the effect, if such a distinction can be made in the first place.[153] In other words, could it be

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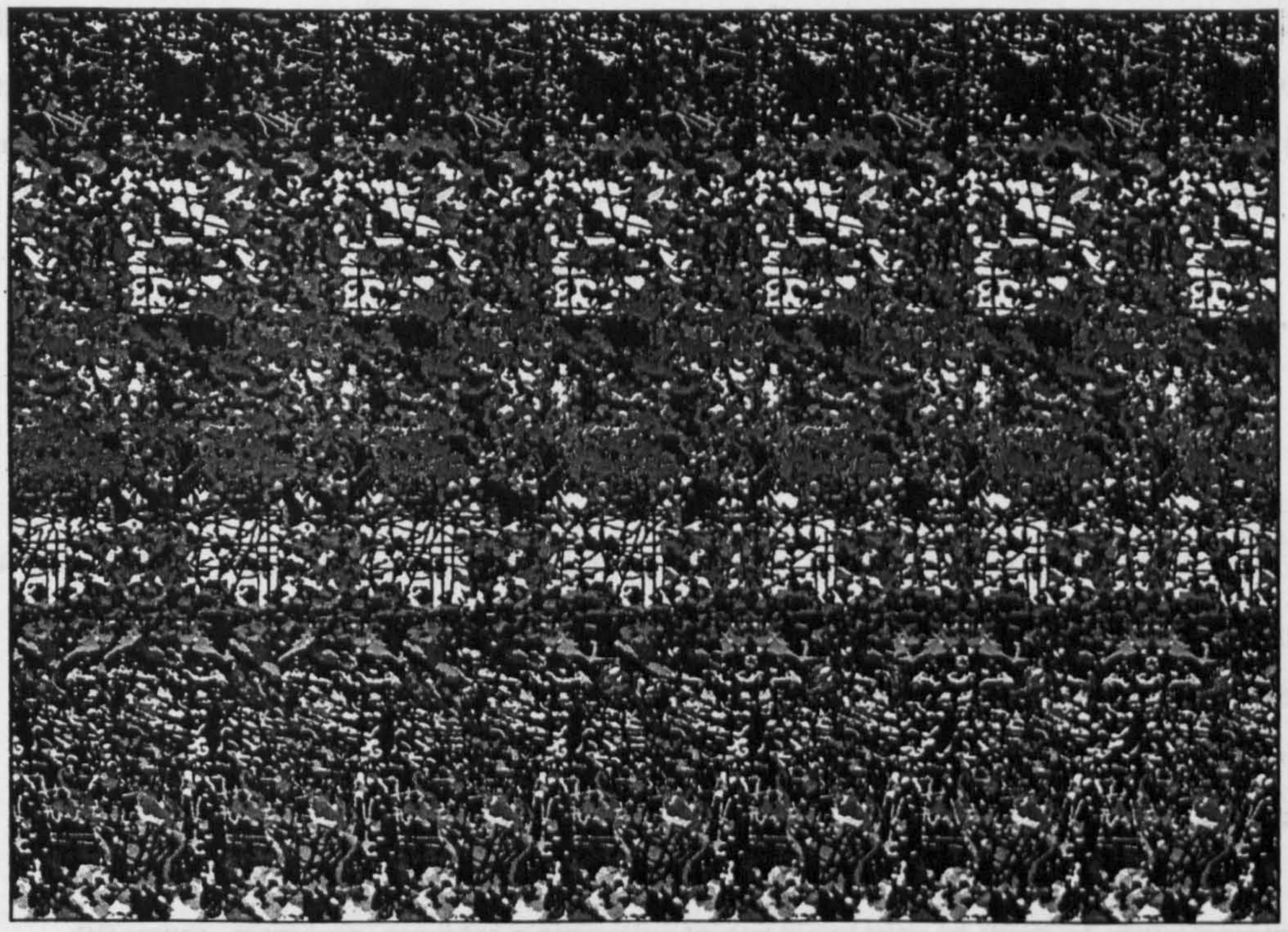
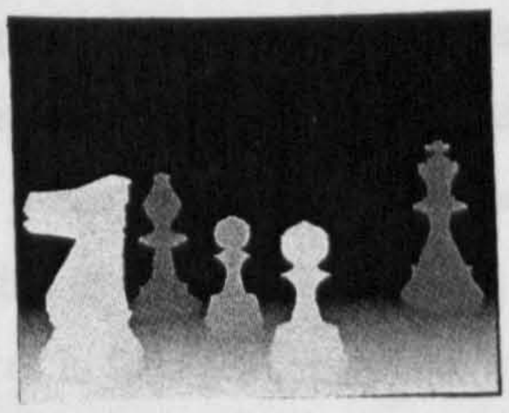
[150] They may exist in other traditions too, but at present I am not in a position to verify this.
[151] Forgie, *"Hyper-Kantianism,"* 208.
[152] *AIR*, 243-45.
[153] I should tentatively point out here that I am aware that the distinction cannot be drawn with absolute clarity. One can always object to this conclusion owing to the fact that, as we shall later in

possible to reach different results, if we change the causes, the categories? The answer is yes, as seen in the example of the Sufis. Hick would not hesitate to share this conclusion, especially at the level of religious experience; in fact, that is what he has been advocating since the early 1980s.

In relation to the Sufis' experience, the application of modern computing methods to the creation of art objects[154] might offer some insight into our perception of things. The relevant method is called *3D-Imaging*.[155] In this method, a picture is hidden behind other small fragments of images which initially seem to be a composite of meaningless objects. But when one concentrates on the picture, one can see a hidden three-dimensional image behind all the puzzling small pictures. The same picture can also be seen from reverse angles (see figure 3.1.).[156]





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the seeing-as and experiencing-as discussion, there is the "duck-rabbit" dilemma which Hick, following Wittgenstein, examines to prove his point about experiencing-as.

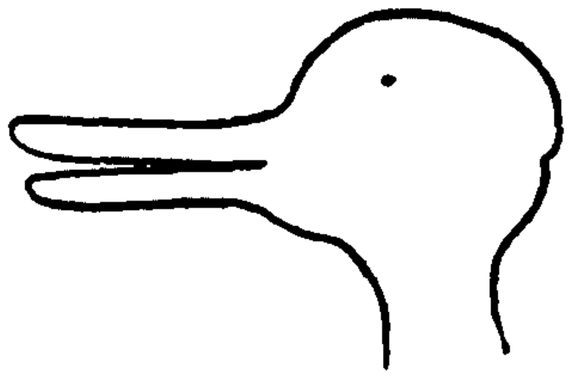
[154] One cannot really ascribe 3D-Imaging's invention solely to the rapid development in the computing sciences, because the original method was invented in 1938 by Sir Charles Wheatstone, independently of computer-aided material, had become popular among photographers during 1950. However, it became commonly available and furthered since 1983 through the introduction of computing methods (Dyckman, D, *Hidden Dimensions: Use Your Deep Vision to Solve Mazes, Riddles, and Other Perplexing Puzzles*, London: Limited Editions, 1994, 9-15).

[155] 3D stands for *three-dimensional*.

[156] Dyckman, D, *Hidden Dimensions*, 61.

The interesting thing about the 3Ds is that, as in the case of the Sufis, the ordinary eye needs some training to be able to spot the hidden image, and even after training it cannot immediately recognise the hidden object, contrary to our perception of things in daily life. Such is also the case with the Sufis. The point is that contrary to what Kant states, there may be other ways of perceiving objects which are alternative to how we perceive them in daily life. In line with the Kantian epistemology, however, the difference in perception does not occur because of a change in the nature of the things-in-themselves; it occurs because of the way we perceive them.

We can now proceed from the particular to the general. At this stage, I think, it is worth bringing another borrowed term into the discussion from the Hickian epistemology of religion: *experiencing-as*. Hick adopts Wittgenstein's term "seeing-as"[157] in fact by taking it one step further to form *experiencing-as*. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein gives the example of the psychologist Jastrow's duck-rabbit figure and tries to settle the issue of ambiguous pictures. The duck-rabbit figure could be perceived either as a duck or as a rabbit (see figure 3.2.).[158]



To explore the difference in the two perceptions, let us follow Marie McGinn:

"The difference in the two visual experiences does not arise from an objective alteration in the object itself, but from a difference in how the subject places the picture in two different contexts... The difference between the two experiences cannot be recorded by pointing to two different objects, but only by reference to the subject's way of responding to the picture, by putting it now in relation to these objects, now in relation to those... [and she concludes] The difference, moreover, provides a corrective to our temptation to think of visual perception purely introspectively, and prompts us to recognise the internal link that exists between what is seen and the subject's way of responding. In this way, the case of seeing-as works against our inclination to think of perception in terms of the influence of objects on a receptive faulty, and draws our attention to the role of an active, responding subject in determining the nature of visual experience, or in fixing what is seen."[159]

Wittgenstein holds that "'Seeing as ...' is not part of perception. And for that reason it is like seeing and again not like."[160] Hick acknowledges that Wittgenstein restricts the notion of seeing-as only to "those exceptional moments when we are confronted by

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[157] Wittgenstein, L, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. Anscombe, G E M, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972, p. 193e-229e (The letter "e" next to the page numbers indicates the English edition of *Philosophical Investigations*).
[158] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 194e.
[159] McGinn, M, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997, 195.
[160] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 197e.

ambiguous pictures and objects"[161] like the duck-rabbit picture. He, on the other hand, takes the notion one step further and argues that "*all* our seeing is seeing-as; or rather that all conscious experiencing, including seeing, is experiencing-as," which includes perception and misperception of anything, e.g. "seeing the protuberance -erroneously- as a squirrel, but also seeing it correctly as knobble on the branch."[162] To illustrate his extension of the notion, Hick takes the instance of a fork. He suggests that even though we always recognise it without any difficulty, a person who had never seen it before, such as a Stone Age man or woman, would not be able to recognise it as a fork. "They might identify it instead as a marvellously shining object which must be full of *mana* and must not be touched; or as a small but deadly weapon; or as a tool for digging; or just as something utterly baffling and unidentifiable."[163] This is because "they would not have the concept of a fork with which to identify it as a fork."[164] In short, if there is not a "given cultural context" which shapes and allows for the formation of concepts[165] through linguistic means, there will be no recognition and experiencing-as. Hick draws attention, at this stage, to the role language plays in creating our "conceptual superstructures" through which we relate ourselves to our environment, organise our everyday life, and appreciate "arts and sciences, philosophies and religions."[166] Conceptual creations form "the inner skeletons structuring the various forms of life, or ways of being human, that constitutes the different cultures of the earth."[167] Hick concludes that "all experience embodies concept-laden forms of interpretation."[168]

Hick's notion of "experiencing-as" would neatly fit within the framework of his philosophy of religions, and may even explain the Sufis' example we quoted above. Because we use different languages, which include not only the communicative medium but also the whole culture, we form different conceptual superstructures. Therefore, according to Hick's experiencing-as notion, different people *experience* the phenomenal Real through its personae and impersonae concepts *as* God, Allah, Jahweh, Brahman, etc.

3.4.3. Schematisation: Personae and Impersonae

Following in Kant's footsteps, Hick furthers his analysis of religions by stating that the two basic categories, God and the Absolute, are "schematised or made concrete within actual religious experience as a range of particular gods or absolutes."[169] Hick calls these

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[161] *AIR*, 140.
[162] *AIR*, 140.
[163] *AIR*, 141.
[164] *AIR*, 141.
[165] Hick defines *concepts* as "recognitional capacities which have been focused, abstracted and fixed by language" (*AIR*, 142).
[166] *AIR*, 141-42.
[167] *AIR*, 142.
[168] *AIR*, 142.
[169] *AIR*, 245.

concretisations *personae* and *impersonae* of the phenomenal Real as humanly experienced and thought.[170]

The culture-relative filter, which Hick names "the particularising factor" and operates like time in the Kantian categories, actualises our human potential for the awareness of the Real. This results in "different ways of being human, developed within the civilisations and cultures of the world."[171] The noumenal Real is *neutral* in being able to be schematised in both ways, divine *personae* and *impersonae*. Those who "relate themselves" to the Real in the "mode of I-Thou encounter" experience it as "personal," while those who "relate themselves to the Real" in the "mode of non-personal awareness" experience it as "non-personal."[172] Thus, some encounter the Real, through the concept of God, as "the God of Israel, or as the Holy Trinity, or as Shiva, or as Allah or as Vishnu...," while others experience it, according to the other category, the Absolute, as "Brahman, or as Nirvana, or as Being, or as Sunyata..."[173]

The main problem with this vision is the leap from the noumenal Real, which we can neither know nor talk about nor experience directly except in holding that it exists, to the phenomenal Real, which we categorise and schematise. As Rose puts it, the noumenal Real is "merely the *formal occasion but not the substantive cause* of the varieties of religious experience."[174] He also thinks that with this understanding of the noumenal Real, Hick's understanding of religion would immediately "collapse into a noncognitivist functionalism or phenomenology."[175] To this criticism Kant's "symbolic anthropomorphism" might offer a partial solution, to which I shall return in the following chapter.

3.4.4. Mythological Truth and the Soteriological Criterion

As can be recalled from one of Hick's earlier articles, he describes the differences in the "revelatory" experiences of the religious traditions as constituting "the largest difficulty in the way of religious agreement."[176] Even though the scale of the problem has since changed, when it moved from being a theology of religions[177] to being a philosophy of religions, Hick still faces the most difficult problem: religious language. To resolve the tension, Hick first introduced the Kantian distinction of the noumenal and the phenomenal Real, whereby he restricted religious language to the phenomenal Real only, since the noumenal is totally ineffable. As the second solution, Hick appeals to mythological truth.

In his editorship of *The Myth of God Incarnate*, the deliberately chosen provocative title was among the first signs of Hick's mythological attitude towards Christian

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[170] *AIR*, 245.
[171] *AIR*, 245.
[172] *AIR*, 245.
[173] *AIR*, 245.
[174] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 79.
[175] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 80.
[176] *TD*, 152, 154.
[177] *COC*, 72.

narrative.[178] In *An Interpretation of Religion*, Hick finalises his thoughts on mythological religious language and how it relates to the two ends of the Real, noumenon and phenomenon. He affirms that the:

> "relationship between the ultimate noumenon and its multiple phenomenal appearances, or between the limitless transcendent reality and our many partial human images of it, makes possible mythological speech about the Real. I define a *myth* as a story or statement which is not literally true but which tends to evoke an appropriate dispositional attitude to its subject-matter. Thus the truth of a myth is a practical truthfulness: a *true myth* is one which rightly relates us to a reality about which we cannot speak in non-mythological terms... Our attitudes and actions are accordingly appropriate or inappropriate not only in relation to our physical and social environments but also in relation to our ultimate environment. And true religious myths are accordingly those that evoke in us attitudes and modes of behaviour which are appropriate to our situation in relation to the Real."[179]

Rose brings our attention to the shift in Hick's thought over the years, as a result of his pluralist hypothesis, from maintaining "the fact-asserting character of particular religious doctrines," to a "pragmatic criterion of religious cognitivity: the soteriological orientation of schematization of the noumenal Real."[180] It is clear that Hick is not focused on "the truth-values of specific truth-claims but only with the judgement whether a particular doctrine, regardless of specific content, orients the religious practitioner to the ... Real."[181]

My immediate concern with this approach is the applicability of the *placebo effect* to religious language and experience. As known in modern medicine, it is the psychological cure of a simple disease, such as headache and stomach ache, with a pseudo-medicine. I am told by a doctor friend that it is a quite common practice in some European countries. In a nutshell, the patient is prescribed a "pseudo-drug" and is instructed that this is the appropriate medicine for this illness. After a certain period, tests confirm that the patient is cured. We witness the same practice at a more common level in our daily lives in children's case with mummy or daddy's "magic kiss." In fact, doctors say that placebo does not work in children, because they are yet to form the notion of "doctor" as "cure bearer." When we move to the religious sphere, a sceptic might argue that, firstly, anything can produce this sort of effect on anybody. Secondly, how can Hick be sure what an appropriate response

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[178] As his contribution to the book, in "*Jesus and the World Religions*," he argues for a mythical understanding of Incarnation against the traditionally held literal meaning, where he declares:

> "That Jesus was God the Son incarnate is not literally true, since it has no literal meaning, but it is an application to Jesus of a mythical concept whose function is analogous to that of the notion of divine sonship ascribed in the ancient world to a king. In the case of Jesus it gives definitive expression to his efficacy as saviour from sin and ignorance and as giver of new life; it offers a way of expressing his significance to the world; and it expresses a disciple's commitment to Jesus as his personal Lord" (*MYGI*, 178). Hick's latest fully developed argument can be found in *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, which he dedicated exclusively to the issue of Incarnation.

[179] *AIR*, 248 (My italics); cf. *GUF*, 166-67; *MYGI*, 178.
[180] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 80.
[181] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 80.

towards the Real is? In fact, as we have discussed at several points, his ascription of religious value to the lives of good Maoist or Marxist citizens might be a good example of this. Their case can be interpreted from several angles, not just from one angle. This brings us to the second topic of this section: the soteriological criterion.

Regarding the question of appropriate or inappropriate modes of behaviour vis-a-vis the Real, Hick writes:

> "It is for the *persona* or *impersona* in relation to which we live to be an authentic manifestation of the Real and for our practical response to be appropriate to that manifestation. To the extent that a *persona* or *impersona* is in soteriological alignment with the Real, an appropriate response to that deity or absolute is an appropriate response to the Real."[182]

To summarise Hick's argument so far: we saw that Hick interpreted the plurality of religions as different approaches to the *personae* or *impersonae* of the phenomenal Real, which in turn relates to the noumenal Real. What allows Hick to declare that great world religions are equal in attaining salvation when responding appropriately to different manifestations of the phenomenal Real? How can he be so sure that the great world religions are offering different ways to the same Real? What is his evidence and where is his proof? Hick responds to these questions by referring to the hybrid term "salvation/liberation" as human transformation from "self-centredness to the Reality-centredness."[183] Despite the fact that salvation is a Christian concept and liberation a Hindu term, Hick tries to prove that the notion exists throughout the great traditions[184] that he focuses on (Judeo-Christian, Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist). To be able to refer to both theistic and non-theistic understandings of transformation, he always uses them together as a concept of ego-transcending in which "a limitlessly better quality of existence is possible."[185] This, Hick alleges, could be

> "by self-committing faith in Christ as one's lord and saviour; or by the total submission to God which is *islam;* or by faithful obedience to the Torah; or by transcendence of the ego, with its self-centred desires and cravings, to attain *moksa* or Nirvana... These are variations within different conceptual schemes on a single fundamental theme: the sudden or gradual change of the individual from an absorbing self-concern to a new centring in the supposed unity-of-reality-and-value that is thought of as God, Brahman, the Dharma, Sunyata or the

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[182] *AIR*, 248.
[183] *AIR*, 36. The early forms of this thought in Hick's philosophy could be traced back to *Evil and the God of Love*, where he proposes his Irenaean theodicy, which declared that one of the main aspects of Christianity was to produce perfect human beings and evil was a necessary ingredient in this "soul-making theodicy." See Hick, J, *Evil and the God of Love*, esp. part IV.
[184] In her article, "*Hick and Saints: Is Saint-Production a Valid Test?*," Rebecca Pentz criticises Hick's imaginative relationship between the soteriological efficacy of the religions and the Real as the source of these transformations or fruits witnessed in the lives of human beings. Contrary to the postulated assumption of Hick, she suggests that each religion "can be soteriologically effective and point toward *separate Realities*." To corroborate this claim, she quotes J Cobb's example, who thinks that every religion leads to a different transcendent Reality (p. 98). See for more Pentz, R, *"Hick and Saints: Is Saint-production a Valid Test?,"* Faith and Philosophy 8, no. 1, 1991, 96-103.
[185] *AIR*, 36.

> Tao. Thus the generic concept of salvation/liberation, which takes a different specific form in each of the great traditions, is that of the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness."[186]

Hick believes that all great world religions share the "soteriological concern," "for the function of post-axial religion is to create contexts within which the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness can take place. Accordingly the basic criterion must be soteriological."[187] The reason for this is that "religious traditions and their various components -beliefs, modes of experience, scriptures, rituals, disciplines, ethics and lifestyles, social rules and organizations- have greater or less value according as they promote or hinder the salvific transformation."[188] As an indication of whether or not salvific transformation takes place within a religion, Hick appeals, according to his principles, to the less "tradition-specific" idea of "the spiritual and moral fruits" of a true religion, as opposed to the "value of credal and communal loyalty," which assumes "the accident of birth at some one particular time and place."[189] Hick takes "the production of saints,[190] both contemplative and practical, individualistic and political," as a valid indicative criterion[191] by which we can recognise a true religion in which "salvific human response" can take place. Hick defends his choice of saints rather than the ordinary followers as an indication of the right criterion by arguing that "saints... are simply persons who are further ahead than the rest of us on the same road."[192]

To me, however, this is not a satisfactory justification; it is in fact more of an excuse rather than a justification. I regard saints as exceptions in any given religion, rather than the norm,[193] since the ordinary followers, who always form the majority, are very different from saints, who are always the minority, in practising a religion and being transformed. If we want to have a balanced evaluation of religions, it should be based not on the minority but on the majority of believers. Nevertheless, one could justify Hick's position because of the impracticality of evaluating all followers of great world religions, even if one were to conduct large scale opinion polls or surveys. Thus it might be justifiable for someone like Hick, who is examining religions specifically from a philosophical perspective and forming a philosophical hypothesis, to prefer a readily available source like saints on which to base his argument.

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[186] *AIR*, 36.
[187] *AIR*, 300.
[188] *AIR*, 300.
[189] *AIR*, 300-301.
[190] Hick defines a saint as "one in whom the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness is so much more advanced than in the generality of us that it is readily noticed and acknowledged" (*AIR*, 301). Hick also argues that we can find an "all-important common feature" in the particular programmes of all great religions, which is that "a transcendence of the ego point of view and its replacement by devotion to or centred concentration upon some manifestation of the Real, response to which produces compassion/love towards other human beings or towards life all" (*AIR*, 301).
[191] *AIR*, 307.
[192] *AIR*, 307.
[193] Rebecca Pentz makes this point well from a Christian perspective: "The church is not 'a museum of saints, but a school for sinners'" (*"Hick and Saints,"* 96).

Hick has, in fact, another justification for his heavy reliance on mystical elements in the great world religions. Acknowledging the possible objections to the "theme of salvation/liberation as the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness" as a "conception of mystical rather than mainstream religion,"[194] he tries to address the issue by remarking that to be able to comprehend the "transforming power of religion," we need to recognise "the experiential spectrum as a whole, both mystical and mediated."[195] He further states that "despite this difference between the highly institutionalised and the less institutional traditions, religious experience is the vital life-blood flowing within each."[196] As if in an attempt to create another Copernican revolution in the philosophy of religions to counter-balance the argument in favour of mystical experience, he comments that "when we recognise the essential role of the experiential aspect of religion in all its forms we are no longer tempted to think that the human transformation which it can effect is in any way secondary or peripheral."[197]

It should be pointed out here that Hick does not appeal to the "production of saints" criterion in order to enable us to make a decision between religions or compare them in terms of success or failure, i.e. the more saints it produces, the better it provides salvation/liberation, as some hold.[198] According to Hick, we do not have enough data to make value judgements about religions as totalities.[199] Rather Hick uses the production of saints to establish the validity of salvation/liberation criterion and test it against all religions. To this end, so far as we can tell, Hick concludes that all have been producing saints and continue to do so and therefore are equally valid and good ways of offering salvation/liberation.[200]

Because of this commitment, Hick speaks of the "lesser traditions, the new religious movements" such as Baha'i, Christian Science and Spiritualism as the "contexts of salvation/liberation." He maintains that the same "soteriological criterion and the same index of saintliness"[201] apply to them too, even though it is harder to do so due to the availability of insufficient information in such a short period of time. He affirms that the "pluralistic hypothesis does not entail any *a priori* judgement concerning the salvific value of these new movements."[202] The possibilities of either living long enough to be compared

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[194] *AIR*, 51.
[195] *AIR*, 51.
[196] *AIR*, 51-52.
[197] *AIR*, 51-52.
[198] See article by Pentz, *"Hick and Saints,"* 96-103.
[199] Hick writes:

> "But if we now attempt comparative judgements, asking whether tradition A has produced more, or better, saints per million of population than tradition B, we quickly discover that we do not have sufficient information for an answer. All that I myself feel able to venture at present is the impressionistic judgement that no one tradition stands out as more productive of sainthood than another... The criterion of saintliness, then, enables us to recognise the great traditions as areas of salvation/liberation, but does not enable us to go on to grade them comparatively" (*AIR*, 307).

[200] *AIR*, 307.
[201] *AIR*, 307.
[202] *AIR*, 307-08.

with great world faiths or dying out soon after their birth and forgotten are open for the new religious movements. Time will tell us the result.

Again without going into much detail, a few comments are necessary here. Hick claims that since a comparative study of religions by using rational methodologies would prove to be inadequate in assessing the true nature of any religion, we should opt for a pragmatic, moral criterion, which takes the moral outcome of any religion into account, i.e. the number of saints it can produce, rather than what it teaches.[203] The problem to my mind is that in order to prove the insuperiority of any religion, Hick uses the argument that, nowadays, it is a commonly held belief that morality is not based on religious convictions; in other words, anybody can be moral without following any set of religious beliefs. However, when it comes to the soteriological criterion, he takes the morally good believers as an indication of any religion both to evaluate that religion and to test his theory; despite the lack of clear evidence to support the idea that they act because of what they believe rather than for the sake of following the universally accepted righteous principles of humanity. This seems to me a circular argument, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

3.5. Partial Conclusions

In this chapter I tried to give an extensive account of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis. I started with his early attempt to form a "Christian theology of religions," as early as 1970s in which he wanted to locate God at the centre of the universe of faiths instead of Christianity. He called it the "Copernican revolution in theology." He supported this theory from three angles. Epistemologically, he appealed to the "world religions" to back up the idea that Jesus' divinity was not unique in the sense that it was natural to the followers of a religion to employ incarnational language about the founder of their religion. Philosophically, he showed the difficulties associated with understanding the incarnation as a theological theory and advocated, instead, that it should be interpreted metaphorically; because it was not a theory but a myth. To corroborate this assertion, he also appealed to the modern biblical studies, which doubts the authenticity of the incarnational verses.

Because of its controversial and provocative character, Hick's theory attracted many critics. This meant that Hick had to polish and develop his theory further, which lasted throughout the 1980s and reached its crescendo in 1989 with the publication of *An Interpretation of Religion*. I presented Hick's mature "philosophy of religions" as he put forward in this book. In response to the charges of "theocentricism," Hick adopted the Kantian distinction of noumenon and phenomenon and replaced God with the Real at the centre. Although the noumenal Real, the Real *an sich*, is the ground of all religious experience, Hick holds that it is totally ineffable. What we have as religions are the phenomenal manifestations of the noumenal Real in the *categories* of different gods and absolutes which are *schematised* either as personal or impersonal. As its totally ineffable,

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[203] *PRP*, 79-81.

religious language does not apply to the noumenal Real, thus it has to be interpreted as mythical and metaphorical. Hick also introduced the soteriological criterion as "human transformation from self-centredness to Reality-centredness," which can be detected in the daily lives of human beings with its fruits, such as striving for justice, equality, the betterment of humankind, etc. Saints in the great world religions are good illustrations of this criterion. In short, Hick concluded that, as in the words of the 13th century Muslim Sufi poet-scholar Jalal al-Din Rumi, "the Lamps are different, but the Light is the same."[204]

As with many other new theories, especially one that is as daring as Hick's, the pluralistic hypothesis drew more critics than advocates.[205] To be able to assess its full strengths and weaknesses, I shall consider, at length, the criticisms directed against the pluralistic hypothesis in the next chapter.

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[204] Nicholson, R A, *Rumi: Poet and Mystic*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978, 166.

[205] It is no surprise, however, to see more resistance to Hick's theory rather than acceptance. I imagine this must have been the case for other theories too, particularly Rahner's *anonymous Christianity*. Even today, we see the Pope John Paul II trying to reverse Rahner's process by issuing more particularistic declarations. Supporting this, Mahmut Aydin observes that:

> "in recent statements of Pope Paul II and the documents of the Pontifical Council there are implications that some of the Catholic authorities want to go back to the pre-Vatican II period in which good Muslims were regarded as anonymous Christians or as those who had an implicit faith in the Church" (p.320).

See for more: Aydin, M, *Modern Western Christian Theological Understandings of Muslims Since the Second Vatican Council*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, PhD, 1998.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. A CRITIQUE OF THE PLURALISTIC HYPOTHESIS

"The Friend comes into my body
looking for the centre, unable
to find it, draws a blade,
strikes anywhere."
Rûmî[1]

4.1. Introduction

So far we have considered two sides of the problem in hand. To begin with, in order to have a balanced argument and also to pave the way for the pluralistic hypothesis, we have followed Hick's critique of other solutions, i.e. naturalistic, exclusivistic and inclusivistic explanations. Then we have presented Hick's pluralistic hypothesis extensively. Within that presentation, we have dealt with some of the important problems inherent in Hick's hypothesis, though these have been handled quite briefly. Now is the time to judge the weight of religious pluralism; in other words, to listen at length to what the critics have to say about Hick's hypothesis.

We pointed out in the closing lines of the previous chapter that a theory as controversial as Hick's has certainly drawn more critics than allies. Consequently, there are many articles and books criticising the pluralistic hypothesis to choose from. However, despite the abundance of critical material, the points that are criticised are more or less the same. The two central charges are: the problems associated with the noumenal Real and the problem of criterion. There are also the minor charges, which Hick calls the "Post-modernist and other critiques,"[2] such as the "theological arrogance," "reductionism"[3] and the globalisation of religions through Western intellectual imperialism.[4] I shall open the chapter by examining these charges. I will not, however, be going into detailed discussion of specifically Christian issues. I shall briefly mention them as they arise while discussing other issues. For instance, when I discuss the problem of reductionism, I shall follow Hick in using the doctrine of Incarnation as a case in point.

Regarding the noumenal Real, I will be looking at mostly theoretical problems like ineffability, necessity or redundancy, postulation and the number of the Real. This will be followed by the practical question of criterion and salvation/liberation. I shall finish with a conclusion on whether Hick's thesis is tenable as it stands or needs some revision.

A final word on the Hickian material I shall use throughout this chapter. Despite Hick's efforts to respond to many of his critics, he could not respond to all because of the sheer mass of criticism that the hypothesis generated. However, one of his latest books,

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[1] Rumi, J, *Unseen Rain*, 16.
[2] *ROF*, 31-56.
[3] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 99-106.
[4] To my knowledge, one of the best critical pieces on this aspect has been produced by Kenneth Surin, which I will be examining in the course of our discussion. See his *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech' : 'Religious Pluralism' in the Age of the McDonald's Hamburger,"* Modern Theology 7, no. 1, Oct. 1990.

the Rainbow of Faiths,[5] deals at some length with the matters that the critics have raised. The book is an "expanded version of the Auburn Lectures delivered in April 1994 at the Union Theological Seminary, New York."[6] Lectures were followed by responses from several distinguished theologians. Later, a discussion was organised, in which two postgraduates presented criticisms of Hick individually and Hick responded to them in turn. Set in a dialogue form, the book, to which I will be referring frequently in addition to other sources, will serve as a useful tool to stimulate the discussion.

4.2. Theological Arrogance

In the previous chapters, we saw that in his earlier attempts at theorising religious pluralism, Hick used the Indian parable of the blind men and the elephant to illustrate different approaches to the Transcendent and our perception of it.[7] Gavin D'Costa and other eminent critics have objected to the example because the analogy is misleading.[8] Unlike the parable, in which there is supposed to be a sighted person who can observe and say that none of the descriptions was in fact correct, in the case of religions there can be no such observer who can evaluate and judge religions either in terms of salvific effectiveness or from any other aspect. Hick's hypothesis seems to presuppose, in one critic's phrase, "the myth of the neutral observer,"[9] or in another's, "a timeless logos enjoying time-transcending encounters with an unchanging reality."[10] In other words, as Kathryn Tanner rightly stresses, "beliefs from a particular point of view are elevated to the truth pure and simple by way of a claim that the standpoint from which such beliefs are formulated is not one standpoint among others."[11] Surely only the Supreme Being can make such judgements. Rather than arrogance, Hick prefers to call this the "claim to have a privileged vantage point."[12]

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[5] London, SCM, 1995.
[6] *ROF*, 148.
[7] *GUF*, 140.
[8] Hick believes that the furore over the blind-men-elephant parable is based on exaggeration. D'Costa calls him a "leading blind-men-elephant parable spokesman" (*"Elephants, Ropes and a Christian Theology of Religions,"* Theology 88, no. 724, July 1985, 260) and describes *God and the Universe of Faiths* as "propounding the blind-men-elephant thesis" (265). Peter Byrne (*"John Hick's Philosophy of World Religions,"* Scottish Journal of Theology 35, no. 4, 1982), Philip Almond (*"John Hick's Copernican Theology,"* Theology 86, 1983) and Michael Barnes (*Religions in Conversation*, London: SPCK, 1989, 78) also criticise him severely for his use of this parable. Hick claims to have used the example only once in *GUF* (140), where he pointed out its limitations. In other words, it was never meant to be a perfect analogy. One can hardly agree with the misleading generalisations made by D'Costa and others. Nevertheless, they have a point: it is a very misleading example, as Hick also acknowledges. However, the same argument can be applied to exclusivism and inclusivism, as Hick does, since they too also claim to have God's eye view of human religious situation. That is to say, even though they do not use the parable, they end up with a worse conclusion than Hick's: restricting salvation to one path or giving one privilege over others.
[9] Springsted, E O, *"Conditions of Dialogue: John Hick and Simone Weil,"* Journal of Religion 72, 1992, 19.
[10] Milbank, J, *"The End of Dialogue,"* in Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions, ed. D'Costa, G, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books: 1990, 174.
[11] Tanner, K, *"Respect for Other Religions: A Christian Antidote to Colonialist Discourse,"* Modern Theology 9, no. 1, 1993, 2.
[12] *ROF*, 49.

Annemarie Schimmel points out that two sufi poets, Sana'i and Rumi, also refer to the blind-men-elephant parable -most likely transferred from India. She cites Shah Waliullah's comment on the parable in which "the Divine Truth" was described "as a tree of which one can touch only a certain part, be it branch or leaf, trunk or fruit."[13] She then extends it to make every religion as a "tree, growing, taking nourishment from the soil, the wind, and the water, and accordingly developing its branches, twigs, and blossoms."[14] I think this might be a better example in explaining Hick's theory in that it respects religions as separate entities whose existence depend on certain elements (the Real, religious experience, etc.), with similar structures (ethics, eschatology, etc.), doing similar functions (salvifically effective). Yet, it has also a limited function, for one can easily object that different trees have different functions, especially some bear fruits (salvifically effective) and some do not (delusory). Thus we leave the metaphors here and return to Hick's responses to theological arrogance charges.

Hick denies the charge and asserts that the hypothesis makes no claim of God's eye view of religions. Hence the charge is unfair. He states rather that his theory has been "arrived at inductively."[15] He starts with the assumption that religious experience is not in *toto delusory*. It does correspond to a transcendent reality and we can witness its fruits in the lives of many ordinary Christians.[16] When this conclusion is extended beyond the Christian experience due to the apparent fruits also observed in other great religions, one faces the conflicting truth-claims of the religions. Hick draws two conclusions from this observation. One is that religions should be judged according to their "salvific efficacy"[17] and the second is his "rejection of any 'universal viewpoint' from which we would be able to judge one religion superior to another."[18] One can immediately question these conclusions by asking, "if it is impossible in our 'partial and fallible human view' of things to say that one religion is unique, do we not also lack 'the eye of omniscience' to see that they are all equal?"[19] Verkamp, in defence of Hick, replies to this question positively: "The evidence certainly does seem to suggest that the religions are basically equal, and the burden of proof would seem to lie, therefore, with those who would assert the contrary."[20]

If this is the case, one might wonder where Hick's project fits within the general framework of things: apparently at a very respectable place, at least in Hick's understanding. Hick views his hypothesis as the best explanation of the "facts described

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[13] Schimmel, *"The Muslim Tradition,"* 140.
[14] Schimmel, *"The Muslim Tradition,"* 140.
[15] *ROF*, 50; *PRP*, 97.
[16] Nevertheless, I should point out that, as will be seen in the forthcoming section on criterion, this contradicts Hick's choice of saintliness as the indication of a true religion.
[17] Hick and Knitter, *MCU*, 30.
[18] Verkamp, B J, *"Hick's Interpretation of Religious Pluralism,"* International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 30, 1991, 113.
[19] Verkamp, *"Hick's Interpretation of Religious Pluralism,"* 113.
[20] Verkamp, *"Hick's Interpretation of Religious Pluralism,"* 113.

by the historians of religion." Hick also thinks that "it is an explanatory theory"[21] which fits best the data in hand. Thus the theory was not constructed theoretically from a grand transcendental observation tower. Rather it started from the ground level religious experience of human beings and is "the best explanation, i.e. the most comprehensive and economical explanation, from a religious point of view, of the facts of the history of religions."[22]

Is Hick's theory really as simple as it sounds? Is it really as inductive as Hick suggests? It does not appear to me so. Firstly, it starts with a theory about religious experience -that it is not in toto delusory. It further depends on other theories about what a "fruit" is in respect of religion and how it should be evaluated. It seems to me that the theory is not, after all, purely inductively reached, owing to the fact that it imposes certain ideas about religious experience and its focus, the effects of religion and the way we understand and interpret human behaviour. Hick is right to the extent that, initially, it does not claim to have a privileged vantage point. But when the final theory takes shape and claims to be the most sound accommodation of the facts presented by the historians of religion, then, in my opinion, the objections still stand. If one does not accept Hick's premises, then it cannot be an inductively constructed theory. The point I am trying to make is that there is more than one way of seeing Hick's theory. One is through his eyes and the other may be called a cynic's way, which takes account of Hick's selective attitude towards world religions. One can claim that Hick selects his materials from world religions carefully in order that they fit neatly with his theory, which is not as tolerant as it is claimed to be. Let us listen to Kenneth Surin:

> "But Hick leaves his readers with very little doubt that his 'hypothesis' is the only one that is adequate to this task - the discussion is always conducted as if no other thoroughly plausible 'hypothesis' were in sight, and indeed none can really be, because the 'data' are always specified in such a way that 'pluralism' is virtually guaranteed from the outset to be the only 'hypothesis' that is seriously in the running when it comes to accounting for 'the data.'"[23]

Last but not least, without the initial general premises surrounding Hick's theory, such as seeing-as and experiencing as, the principle of credulity etc., it would have never survived to become an inductive theory, as Verkamp pointedly suggests:

> "There is no question that Hick's theory rests upon multiple assumptions about a singular, transcendental grounding and the fundamental equality of the various religions that cannot be inductively verified beyond all doubt."[24]

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[21] *ROF*, 50.
[22] *ROF*, 51.
[23] Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 78.
[24] Verkamp, *"Hick's Interpretation of Religious Pluralism,"* 116.

In *Religion and Revelation,*[25] K Ward examines Hick's theory and concludes that it is not a logically sound argument.[26] Hick responds in turn that he has never attempted to produce a "logically irresistible argument." All he was trying to do was to produce the "best explanation." To illustrate this point, one can cite the issue of one Real instead of many. He admits that we cannot rule out *"a priori"* that there may exist "a number of ultimate realities" perceived as either "an orderly federation or a feuding multitude or an unrelated plurality."[27] However, he suggests that "if from a religious point of view we are trying to think, not merely of *what is logically possible*[28]... but of the simplest hypothesis to account for the plurality of forms of religious experience and thought," we should stick to the singularity of the noumenal Real.[29] He further insists that "a proffered 'best explanation' is not a proof, because it is always open to someone else to come forward and offer what they believe is a better explanation."[30] Therefore, he challenges critics to produce a "viable alternative" instead of complaining.

The modest intentions of Hick's pluralism (namely that it is a unifying, all-embracing and very tolerant theory, unlike others) has also been challenged by several critics. They think that despite these ostensibly clean and good purposes, it is a form of exclusivism. G Loughlin, as a passionate critic of Hick, writes:

> "Pluralism is a subtle rhetoric, its very frankness is a deception. Only pluralism names the object of its mastery. It claims to name the truth of plurality and to be the *ism* that captures its actuality; the 'system' that masters the fact. In blurring the distinction between *plurality* and *pluralism,* by subsuming the former within the latter, pluralism seeks to erase all that may resist the theory that so names the plural. It seeks to forget what is here plural, the variety and difference of religion; the otherness of strangers."[31]

Loughlin is not alone in this sort of harsh critique. D'Costa suggests that pluralism is a "form of exclusivism" in the sense that it uses a "notion of exclusive truth" which leaves out those who fall outside this notion.[32] J V Apczynski also claims it is implicitly exclusivist because its revisionist attitude towards religions discourages dialogue.[33] Finally, O C Thomas sees it as a form of inclusivism because it uses the same normative logic, that is the notion that the pluralist position is "more adequate, valid, or true than any other," an arrogant attitude which is ascribed to inclusivists by pluralists though they

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[25] Ward, K, *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.
[26] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 313-316 and *"Truth and the Diversity of Religions," Religious Studies* 26, 1990, 12.
[27] *AIR*, 248-49.
[28] My emphasis.
[29] *AIR*, 248-49.
[30] *ROF*, 50-51.
[31] Loughlin, G, *"Prefacing Pluralism: John Hick and the Mastery of Religion,"* Modern Theology 7, no. 1, 1990, 46.
[32] D'Costa, G, *"The Impossibility,"* 233-258.
[33] Apczynski, J V, *"John Hick's Theocentrism: Revolutionary or Implicitly Exclusivist?,"* Modern Theology 8, 1992, 49

too are guilty of the same offence.[34] In all fairness, I consider Loughlin's critique to be unfair and misdirected. He judges the pluralism and the Hick of his imagination, which may not adequately describe Hick himself.[35] Despite its revisionist attitude and advocacy for a mythical understanding of religious language, pluralism never claims that humanity will arrive a at single universal religion some day;[36] rather it maintains that "the adherents of each of the existing world faiths should respond as fully as possible to the Real, the Ultimate, in their own way by devoutly living out their own tradition."[37]

I will not repeat here Hick's response to the charges of exclusivism since I have dealt with them in chapter one, where I examined Race's threefold typology. This brings us to the political implications of pluralism and the charges related to them.

In his well-documented essay, Surin contends that despite their standing on different stages regarding the relationship between Christianity and other religions, the underlying thought behind the attempts of Hendrik Kraemer, Rahner, Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith is the same. Surin describes:

> "Once upon a time, when they administered empires, the European powers and their peoples were able to get away with the blind presumption that because their religion - Christianity - was unquestionably the supreme religion none of its 'rivals' was really worthy of our serious and unqualified attention. Then the world changed. The colonial powers were increasingly unable to maintain their dominance, and the lands they controlled became independent nations. As this transformation was taking place, it became progressively more difficult for Christians to maintain, 'unthinkingly,' that the religions of these lands were in a relationship of 'automatic' subordination to Christianity."[38]

Surin then quotes extensively from C Smith, Rahner and Hick to justify this statement. He concludes:

> "That these sentiments were expressed, and continued to be expressed with hardly any real qualification... is a tribute to the intractable and remorseless optimism which united these otherwise very different thinkers. It is not difficult to see that each of our four thinkers subscribes to a particular periodization with certain correlative alignments in a Christian theology of religions: the period of Western imperial expansion and government (associated by them with the 'absoluteness' of Christianity, Christian 'exclusivism,' 'non-dialogue,' et cetera) *versus*[39] the period of 'post-colonialism' (aligned by them with the 'non-absoluteness' of Christianity, 'inclusivism' and 'pluralism' and even a 'liberal exclusivism,'[40] 'dialogue,' et cetera)."[41]

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[34] Thomas, O C, *"Religious Plurality and Contemporary Philosophy: A Critical Survey,"* Harvard Theological Review 87, 1994, 198-99.
[35] For more, see Hick's response to Loughlin: *"A Response to Gerard Loughlin,"* Modern Theology 7, no. 1, 1990, 57-66.
[36] *AIR*, 379; *ROF*, 123-124.
[37] *ROF*, 41.
[38] Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 69.
[39] My emphasis.
[40] By "liberal exclusivism," Surin has the later Kraemer in mind, as found in *Why Christianity of All Religions?* (trans. H Hoskings, Philadelphia: the Westminster Press, 1962), as opposed to the early

Surin believes that "the periodization and the accompanying correlations" shared by the famous four, whom he names "Cantwell Smith and Co.," are "hopelessly simplistic and deeply problematic." It is simplistic because the independence achieved did not change the lives of ordinary believers in these ex-colonies. The power of rule has only changed hands from the colonialists to new "ruling elites." "Instead of 'liberation' after withdrawal' of the imperial power," Surin claims, "those who do not belong to the ruling elites... continue to live the same lives of unrelieved toil and unabated poverty."[42] Therefore, Surin concludes, "the periodizations of these thinkers... betokens a thoroughly 'Eurocentric' or 'First World,' perspective on their parts," and "the 'global space' of the discourses" three-fold-typology "effectively incorporates, and thereby dissolves, the localised and oppositional 'spaces'" of the underprivileged people.[43]

The periodization common to all four theorists is also problematic owing to the fact that it "never acknowledges that the part played by Christianity in shaping the understandings that Europeans had of the peoples of other continents was itself something that changed over time," as the sources have changed. Following in the footsteps of B McGrane in *Beyond Anthropology,*[44] Surin identifies four different parameters used by the Europeans to evaluate others. First, "up to and including the sixteenth century," it was Christianity, which was "the only religion, and those who did not profess it simply had no religion."[45] Second, during the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries, new categories came into play, such as "ignorance, error, untruth and superstition," which would basically mean that "the other" was "unenlightened" and "primitive." The third shift came with the industrial revolution during the 19th century. With the emergence of anthropology as a discipline, "different 'stages of development'" have been introduced "between the pre-historically fossilized 'primitive' and the evolutionary advancement of modern Western science and civilisation."[46] Beginning with the "early twentieth century," the fourth shift has occurred: now "culture" was the key word to understand the difference. Surin quotes McGrane: "We think under the hegemony of the ethnological response to the alienness of the Other; we are today, contained within an anthropological concept of the Other. Anthropology has become our modern way of seeing the Other as, fundamentally and merely, culturally different."[47]

Kraemer as projected in *The Christian Message in a Non-christian World* (London: The Edinburgh House Press, 1938). To illustrate the point, Surin quotes from *Why Christianity of All Religions?* (p. 123) where Kraemer, referring to a UNESCO conference in Manila in January 1960, states, in agreement with Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish and Roman Catholic scholars, that 'for all the major religions the paramount problems are the same." (See Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 71; 93, fn 7).

[41] Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 70.

[42] Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 71.

[43] Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 71.

[44] McGrane, B, *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other*, New York: Columbia UP, 1989.

[45] Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 73.

[46] Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 73.

[47] Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 73-74.

"The upshot," Surin maintains, "is that 'difference' now becomes 'democratised.'" He also identifies Hick's version of pluralism as "the most 'democratic' version of the 'pluralistic hypothesis.'"[48]

Surin thinks that it is no surprise that as the "missionaries of the 'new' look" "the Cantwell Smiths and Hicks of this world are seemingly a new kind of subject, one that is 'universal' or 'global' in the way that the McDonald's hamburger has become the 'universal' or 'global' food."[49] Surin's position is that the people who eat "the first 'universal' food," "the McDonald's hamburger," and drink the universal drink, Coca-Cola, and wear the universal dress, Levi's blue jeans, "also consume the American way of life," and the pluralists who propose a "world ecumenism" "'consume' a certain way of life." This may not be called "the American way of life," but it is "the 'life' of a world administered by global media and information networks, international agencies and multinational corporations," according to which "nations, cultures, religions, and so forth, are simply obsolete if they are maintained in their old forms as fixed and intractable 'particularities'." This ideology, Surin suggests, first enables the McDonaldization and Coca-Colanization of the world and then sustains it by the proposals of the pluralists.[50]

Surin insists that modern times did not bring anything new as far as the West's relation with the Other is concerned: it is still domination and acculturation of the Other by different means. Nowadays the fashion is democracy and therefore, the democratic means of seeing the Other must certainly be employed by the civilised West. Pluralism happens to be the means of achieving this, even though neither the Western view of the Other has changed, nor have the conditions that the majority of the Other live under. To put it more bluntly, pluralism and other means are only alternative ways of exploiting the Other and their resources. That is why pluralism does not offer any radical difference in its treatment of the Other; it cultures the difference and eventually leads the way to exploitation by the multinationals. It is but another disguised way of suppressing the Other whereby the few maintain control over the many by a more discreet approach. When one approach failed in achieving the goal, the West invented another one, which happens to be pluralism for some, liberal exclusivism for others and inclusivism for some

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[48] Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 74-75. Surin also remarks that neither Troeltsch nor Cantwell Smith can be a "genuine pluralist" for the fact that the former had developed an "ethnocentric version of 'pluralistic hypothesis,'" due to his emphasis on the importance of Christianity for the West, while the latter "has so far retained... a number of vestigial Bultmannian notions (e.g., the 'presentness' of 'faith-events,' 'God's mission to all world')" (Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 74-75; for Christian elements in Smith's theology of religions, see also Almond, P C, *"Wilfred Cantwell Smith as Theologian of Religions,"* Harvard Theological Review 76, no. 3, 1983, especially 340-41). It has to be pointed out that it is hard to share Surin's conclusion, due to his narrow understanding of pluralism. One can easily reverse the argument by saying that Hick's starting point, the notion of an all loving God, is quite Christian too, as one critic pointed out, which may make it less democratic. For me, the point is not strictly the Christian elements in a theory; rather the focus should be on the soteriological equality of the religions. (For Christian elements in Hick's hypothesis, see Hart, T A, *"Universalism: Two Distinct Types,"* in Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell, ed. Cameron, N M de S, Carlisle, U K: Paternoster Press, and Grand Rapids, USA: Baker Book House: 1992, 7).

[49] Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 72.

[50] Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 78-79.

others. These attempts have not come about because these scholars have cared about the Other, but to restore the credibility of the West and Christianity and the benefits gained by the multinationals, which in turn means the West.

Globalization has also been opposed by many Muslim scholars. They point out the dangers of globalization and suspicious of the West launching a "neo-imperialism" on the yet hot ashes of the colonial era which cost Muslims so dearly. Mahmoud M Ayoub, for instance, who argues for "unity within diversity," picks on English becoming as a global medium of communication and warns us:

> "What people are most comfortable with is their own language and their own culture. So, we are not, and I hope will never be, heading towards global anything. *Globalization is the latest form of Western neo-imperialism.* It is therefore one of the evils of modern times. What we should be aiming for, as the Qur'an enjoins, is the acceptance and appreciation of the plurality of cultures and religions, but within the unity of faith in the One God."[51]

Even though I agree with Ayoub's fair point, as we shall see shortly, I am sure Hick is also aware of this danger and agrees with Ayoub.

Hick initially dismisses the charges on the grounds of "guilt by association argument." He maintains that the argument behind these political criticisms is that "to condemn the evils of the multinationals' influence is at the same time to condemn religious pluralism." He holds that just because "contemporary religious pluralism is part of the same world as multinational capitalism" does not entail the conclusion that it is an "ally of international capitalism and its repressive universalising effects." It is "simply unfair and logically untenable"[52] to judge religious pluralism merely on the basis of these associations.

However, when pressed harder he eventually gives in by accepting the responsibility of the West and the US for the mess that the world is in with respect to the unjust distribution of wealth. Yet this time, he generalises the guilt by saying that the same charges apply

> "impartially to religious exclusivists, inclusivists, and pluralists and also to post-modernists and everyone else in our societies, even including those who are personally working for world peace or against racism and against the unjust north-south economic divide. A Western post-modernist and a Western religious pluralist may be equally conscious of the evils of the international hegemony of the financial institutions, and yet be equally a part of the world that it has produced. But to use this as an argument specially against religious pluralism is, surely, simply unfair and logically untenable."[53]

Anticipating such a move from the pluralists, Surin highlights the immediate difficulty confronted by the critics, namely that the pluralists are seemingly "totally on the side of the angels." He points out the paradoxical way that pluralists address the all-familiar

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[51] Ayoub, M M, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* Encounters 3, no. 2, 1997, 110 (Emphasis added).
[52] *ROF*, 39.
[53] *ROF*, 39.

issues like "racism, the oppression of women, imperialism," etc. On the one hand, these matters are ostensibly condemned by them, while on the other hand, they are "broached... in a peculiarly abstract and defused way." To illustrate the point, he writes that "European colonialism is condemned, but the neocolonialism into which it has been largely transmuted is again not positioned in their discourses."[54] He also cites the condemnation of the bad examples of the West in the past, while the new ones such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have been left untouched, which Surin construes as a "barely concealed enthusiasm for 'our times.'"[55]

In short, Surin senses a simplification and cover up in Hick's discourse about both the past and the present atrocities committed by the West against the Other. In order to achieve this, pluralism simply marginalizes the Other by reducing the differences almost to nil and subdues it for the ruling powers, be they colonial, political or economic.

A few comments are necessary here. It is true that pluralism in its present shape is a child of the twentieth century, but this does not necessitate the conclusion that it is an invention of modern day imperialist powers. Firstly, as Hick rightly suggests, it has ancient roots.[56] Secondly, it seems unfair to side pluralism with the multinational powers and accept it as a supporter of the *status quo* just because, as a philosophical interpretation, it does not concentrate meticulously on the details of power share in the societies. It cannot do so, because it is not a political theory. Thirdly, one cannot accuse Hick of being a spokesperson for imperialism in the area of religion because his theory lacks the wider scope of a political theory. Naturally Hick focuses on the good points which the great religions share and values them, but we should not forget the fact that he does not turn a blind eye to the problems caused by the religions. Indeed one of his starting points is this notion that the great religions of the world have been mediums in the hands of their believers for committing both good and bad deeds, which would mean for Hick that there is no superior religion in achieving the good and suppressing the bad.[57] What matters, then, is not the medium but the human beings and their efforts. This is one of the fundamental epistemological equations of Hick which we ought not to underestimate.

We also ought not to forget the fact that none of the pluralists is trying to establish a religious political theory; it is a well known fact that Hick is more of a philosopher-pluralist, while C Smith is a historian-pluralist. Yet it seems to me that the way Surin treats pluralist theories is far more political than a theory of religious pluralism would allow. It is simply, as I see it, too much to ask from a theory to address all the political questions and their implications as well as the religious and philosophical dimensions. It may, then, become a religio-political theory rather than a religio-philosophical one. To exemplify this, I would like to pinpoint one issue. In his article, Surin appears to be

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[54] Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 86.
[55] Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 86.
[56] *ROF*, 34-37.
[57] *MCU*, 30.

wanting to ascribe some value to the fact that, despite their different ethnic origins and backgrounds, Hick and Smart, two Englishmen, and Cantwell Smith, a Canadian, happened to develop their theories in the United States as the leading world power and the home for many of the multinationals.[58] This does not seem to be a sound argument at least as regards Hick and Smart, due to the fact that the seeds of pluralism had been sown in English soil with the publication of *The Myth of God Incarnate*, when Hick was in Birmingham. I think this goes also for Smart who was educated in the British universities, taught in the U K for more than two decades and produced important works like *Reasons and Faiths* (1958) and *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (1969) etc. Even if Surin's implication was right, it should be applied to the work of every scholar who happens to be in the U S, including Surin's, placing him in a dilemma. He too is an Englishmen living in the U S, but can see the defects in the theories of religions that others cannot. If it is the effect of the environment, he should not have been different from the rest, since they all live and develop their theories and critiques in the same country. Thus it must be in the mind, rather than where one lives or writes.

Last but not least, we should bear in mind that Hick is someone who conjoins *saintliness* and *politics* to produce the term "political saint," and finds this the "more typical form of saintliness today."[59] Hence he reveres greatly the twentieth century figures like Mahatma Gandhi,[60] whom he perceives as "the greatest political saint of our century,"[61] Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. These are modern-day saints in their struggles against the oppressions and injustices inflicted upon their nations by the Western ruling powers.[62] Indeed, he co-edited and published a book on Gandhi, *Gandhi's Significance for Today*,[63] in the same year he published his masterpiece on religious pluralism (*An Interpretation of Religion*). To me, this is an indication of as far as a philosopher of religion can involve himself in international politics.

I believe Surin has a fair point in his critique of Hick's reductionist and homogenist attitude towards world religions; this constitutes one of my major concerns over Hick's theory and will be dealt with in the following section.

4.3. Reductionism

Surin traces an overall reductionist attitude in the approach of the scholars dealing with the issue of religious diversity from a Christian perspective:

> "Common to Kraemer, Rahner, Cantwell Smith and Hick is the assumption that the task of 'theorising' the relationships between religions is one that is pre-eminently, or even solely, a

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58 Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 79.
59 *ROF*, 80.
60 *AIR*, 306.
61 *ROF*, 80.
62 *ROF*, 80.
63 Hick, J and L Hempel, eds., *Gandhi's Significance for Today*, London: Macmillan, 1989. Hick also dedicates part V (The Saints Come Marching In) of his latest book for Gandhi's thought as a case study. See: Hick, J, *The Fifth Dimension*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1999, 173-218.

> matter of affirming, clarifying, defending, and perhaps discarding certain philosophical and theological *formulations.*"[64]

Thus one can infer that, speaking from a postmodernist angle, every theoretical attempt on religious diversity would be criticised from several points of view. As far as Hick's pluralistic hypothesis is concerned though, it is reductionist from four angles: soteriologically, ontologically, theologically and epistemologically.

Soteriologically speaking, Hick has taken the self-transformation of human beings from self-centredness to Reality-centredness as the central tenet and aim of the religions, for which he uses the term "salvation/liberation." Hick describes the attainment of salvation/liberation as[65] "to transcend the ego point of view... to become re-centred" in the Real, which triggers an "actual change in human beings..., which can be identified... by its moral fruits."[66] How comprehensive is this understanding of religion as a ground-breaking starting point for the evaluation of the great world religions? Speaking from a Muslim point of view, I would suggest that firstly, its scope is narrow that it excludes the majority of ordinary believers and primitive religions, secondly, it desacralises religion by not giving enough emphasis on the afterlife aspect of religions and thirdly, it downgrades religion to morality. To me, Hick's understanding of salvation/liberation sidelines the spiritual aspect of religion. One can look at the issue from two different angles: take the example of a morally good Muslim who strives for the betterment of his fellow human beings, but does not practice Islam in the strict sense of the word, i.e. neither prays five times a day, nor fasts during Ramadhan, etc. Let us imagine another Muslim who is a devout practitioner, fasts, prays, etc., but, nevertheless, does not involve himself very much in social activities which benefit society and humanity at large. It is obvious that according to Hick's criterion, the former is more likely to be saved and liberated than the latter, whereas from an Islamic point of view, despite the fact that neither is an ideal Muslim, the result is the opposite of Hick's. The examples could obviously be expanded to accommodate other traditions. Thus, it is not difficult to see that Hick's soteriological criterion is reductionist, though it may be appealing at first to the adherents of many of the traditions.

Another aspect of this problem which one can detect is whether Hick is just in his treatment of the primal religions and consistent in his focus on salvation. We have seen in the previous chapter that Hick pointed out the different function of the pre-axial religions, namely, "the preservation of cosmic and social order."[67] My question is whether Hick is doing justice to the primal religions by leaving them out of the salvational scheme,[68]

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[64] Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 79.
[65] *AIR*, 36-54.
[66] *ROF*, 17.
[67] *AIR*, 22.
[68] *ROF*, 109; *AIR*, 23. This is because they do not offer a "radical human transformation," due to their focus on "keeping the communal life on an even keel both in itself and in relation to the sacred." Hick considers them as "communal rather than individual responses to the Real." (*ROF*, 109).

despite his acknowledgement that they could be beneficial to modern societies in issues like the sustenance of ecological equilibrium and the awareness of the importance of "community."[69] I find this problematic and inconsistent when I consider his understanding of saintliness as a political response to the problems of the society one lives in. On the one hand Hick favours the individualistic responses to the Real, while on the other hand he leaves out the communal responses, despite the fact that he wants a better world. What I am arguing for is more widening and emphasising of the communal transformation aspects of religion, if Hick is serious about his search for a better world by peaceful means. I believe this is a reductionist attitude towards primitive religions, as far as the scope of pluralistic hypothesis is concerned. What could be the reason for this, one might wonder? Apczynski would offer some help: "Might hidden cultural assumptions regarding the superiority of 'individualism' be informing Hick's pattern of interpretation which lead him to overlook the soteriological efficacy of communal, sacramental forms of transformation.?"[70]

On the ontological level, one can observe two problems. One is the apparent problem of positing of the Real and the questions it raises, which I shall leave to the next section. The second is the issue of the implicit pressures on being different and being able to express it freely, especially as regards those who do not conform to the pluralist understanding, due to the fact that one can easily sense a dismissive attitude towards all differences. Once more, Surin deserves extensive quotation:

> "Hick's discursive 'space' is the typical 'space' of an educated liberal 'westerner'... The occupant of this 'space' is someone who ceaselessly dissolves the dense particularities of struggles against domination and injustice, who cannot allow for the impingement and encroachment of one social and political 'space' upon another because he is totally resolved to maintain the abstract equivalence of all such 'spaces.' The result is a complete occlusion of the always contingent forces, 'the powers,' which destroy, reconfigure and realign these 'spaces.'"[71]

The outcome, Surin insists, is "to affirm the abstract equivalence of all such 'spaces:' 'good' here, but also there; 'bad' here, but also there," which, as cited from S P Mohanty, is "'debilitatingly insular spaces.'" "This subject," Surin suggests, "ranges over the globe only to conclude that while of course everything is different everywhere, in the end things are perhaps not all *that* different after all" and "most important of all for the 'religious pluralists,' devout men and women can be found in every corner of the world."[72] Another critic spells this out more clearly: "Others, it is true, are not rejected by

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[69] *AIR*, 28-29.
[70] Apczynski, *"John Hick's Theocentrism,"* n. 4, 50.
[71] Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 88-89.
[72] Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 89. Surin quotes Mohanty from *"Us and Them: On the Philosophical Bases of Political Criticism,"* The Yale Journal of Criticism 2, 1989, 14-15.

pluralists for being different. They are accepted, but only in so far as difference is not the last word."[73]

I am not sure whether the charge of diffusing difference is totally justifiable. One can answer on Hick's behalf that: firstly, he never argues for a "single universal religion." There will always *be* different religions, offering different ways of salvation/liberation. By pointing to the Real as the ultimate ground of religious experience pluralism never aims to erase the different ways of salvation. Secondly, his hypothesis leaves room for the flourishment of new religious movements by acknowledging their positive contribution to human transformation.[74] Lastly, for Surin to claim that "in the end things are perhaps not all *that* different after all," it seems to me that he is moving between theological and political discursive spaces. Hick is clearly aware of this distinction. His hypothesis is constructed on the theological space, but does not turn a blind eye to political, economical and otherwise problems that we suffer. The suggestion of the salvific/liberational efficacy of religions never asserts the equation of the different political discursive spaces. Hick's emphasis on political saints, as indicated earlier, illustrates this point satisfactorily.

Because epistemological and theological questions are interwoven and overlap, I would like to examine them together. I will take Hick's epistemology as an umbrella and treat the theological questions as part of it by way of exemplifying his epistemology. By epistemological reductionism I mean Hick's stance about religious language and its interpretation, and the way the pluralists gather their evidence. Built upon this epistemology, by theological reductionism I mean basically Hick's attitude towards the conflicting truth-claims of the religions and their effect upon their followers, such as his understanding of the doctrine of Incarnation.

Critiques suggest that Hick's epistemology assumes a "conception of human knowing" which "ignores or dismisses the concrete differences between the traditions, homogenising them into a false unity."[75] Thus it "evacuates of content the doctrines and stories presented as true by the religious traditions by making their cognitivity depend solely upon their hypothetical power to orient human beings toward the merely formal and otiose concept of the noumenal Real."[76] This results in a "global meta-narrative that subordinates all individual and communal narratives, thus undermining 'alterity' and eliminating the otherness of the Other."[77] In other words, "religious pluralism gives an importantly different account of the great world religions from that which each gives of itself,"[78] or, as Rose remarks, it is an "outcome that negates these diverse and specific

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[73] Tanner, K, *"Respect for Other Religions,"* 11.
[74] *ROF*, 109-111.
[75] *ROF*, 40; see also Surin, *"A Certain 'Politics of Speech,"* 72.
[76] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 99.
[77] *ROF*, 40.
[78] *ROF*, 40.

doctrines and stories as cognitive *in their own right,* by reducing doctrines and stories to the status of ornamental metaphors."[79]

To the charge of homogenisation, Hick responds by acknowledging that "the religions ask different questions" which are "*specifically* different," but "*generically* the same." "They all presuppose a profound present lack, and the possibility of a radically better future; and they are all answers to the question, how to get from one to the other."[80] This may be true but I think Rose's point is still unanswered since the way of testing a narrative's power lies in the individual whether one is transformed or not. On the individual level it is difficult to assess this and it does not prove anything. But when we take into account the cumulative evidence, Hick seems to be right that despite the specific differences the genre of the religious discourse is the same.

To be able to understand this answer, we need to go back and unearth the conception of human knowing Hick presupposes and the type of reason he follows. According to this notion of knowing, "all our knowledge is grounded in assumptions derived from our dwelling in a specific cultural heritage."[81] In Hick's case, it is the "tradition of modern liberal culture" which postulates a "universal reason that 'interprets' selectively the myriad of sensory impulses from its environment according to acquired conceptual categories."[82]

But can there be a universal reason appealing to everybody? Apparently, not. Because "'reason'... is never what 'any reasonable man holds, but is always tied to a particular language and communal form of life constituting its tradition."[83] Apczynski contends that Hick's theory is a

> "rather parochial one that has been shaped by a contemporary version of the liberal intellectual tradition. Its modern origins include the Enlightenment rejection of all forms of tradition-constituted reason in favour of a universal conception of rationality appealing to methods and principles deemed unexceptional by any reflective person. Upon the collapse of these Enlightenment certainties, twentieth century postmodernists continue to maintain this universal conception of reason, but now in an inverted form that upholds the relativity of all viewpoints - but without any explicit acknowledgement of its own."[84]

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[79] Rose, *Knowing the Real,* 99.
[80] *ROF,* 41.
[81] Apczynski, *"John Hick's Theocentrism,"* 40.
[82] Apczynski, *"John Hick's Theocentrism,"* 42.
[83] Apczynski, *"John Hick's Theocentrism,"* 46.
[84] Apczynski, *"John Hick's Theocentrism,"* 47; for similar points expressed by Milbank, see his *"The End of Dialogue,"* 174-191.
Regarding the application of this understanding to Hick's thesis, Apczynski also opines:

> "Corresponding to this is a perspectival view of truth. Since liberalism approaches all traditions from a universal standpoint, and since contemporary liberalism has been transformed so that it does not (explicitly) recognise any cultural heritage as normative, all claims to truth made from within particular traditions must be viewed from the vantage point of outsiders. To be sure, one must concede that members of a tradition make substantive claims to truth, but only from within the limits of their respective viewpoints" (Apczynski, *"John Hick's Theocentrism,"* 47).

Apczynski concludes that "Hick's implicit commitment to the liberal intellectual tradition effectively detaches him from the substantive truth-claims of every tradition so that in the final analysis the truth of none of them matters,"[85] which corresponds to a "perspectival view of truth," i.e., to approach "all traditions from a universal standpoint," or "from the vantage point of outsiders."[86]

It is this detached "perspectival view of truth" that allows Hick to see the religious questions as "*specifically* different," but "*generically* the same,"[87] owing to the fact that epistemologically he is no closer to one than the other. But he immediately warns us that he is not ultimately arguing for a new universal world religion, which will "destroy religious particularity"; rather he continues to "view different types of religious experience as complementary and not mutually exclusive."[88] Therefore he vividly expresses that "the adherents of each of the existing world faiths should respond as fully as possible to the Real, the Ultimate, in their own way by devoutly living out their own tradition."[89]

However, there is a two-edged downgrading of religions in Hick's theory. One aspect is his understanding of religious language, which starts with his grounding of religious belief on religious experience. Because all experience is experiencing-as, human consciousness has a major role to play in Hick's epistemology in constructing our knowledge, which includes religious language too. He believes that input from our environment is interpreted variously in our brain depending on our existing socio-cultural filters. Therefore Hick believes, agreeing with Kant, that "all that we say about God is 'mythical' and symbolic,' meaning that it does not apply literally to the Real *an sich*."[90] Thus all religious literature relating to the Real is mythical, which is contrary to what many of the traditions hold. This attitude, as far as I can see, takes Hick much closer to the naturalistic interpretations of religion, regardless of its claim to be a religious one. As someone coming from a Muslim background, I could see that it also presupposes very much *a* particular Christian understanding of revelation.[91] That is to say, it reflects a very loose understanding of the Bible as a source of knowledge of Jesus and of God, possibly because of the way the scriptures were compiled, written and understood within Christianity. It might be an easy task for Christian pluralists like Hick to mythologise the language about God, for they hold that the New Testament authors have put words in the mouth of Jesus. The authors were not to blame, because they wrote what they recollected; but, the pluralists claim, one should always bear in mind this crucial difference. However, when it comes to Islam, the situation is very different. Hick's mythical and symbolic

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[85] Apczynski, *"John Hick's Theocentrism,"* 48.
[86] Apczynski, *"John Hick's Theocentrism,"* 47.
[87] *ROF*, 41.
[88] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 87.
[89] *ROF*, 41.
[90] Verkamp, *"Hick's Interpretation of Religious Pluralism,"* 107.
[91] Surely, the implication here is that there are many accounts of revelation within Christianity which take a more serious view of the divine scriptures. For them, revelation means a lot more than it means for Hick.

conclusion about the character of religious language is in almost total disagreement with the Islamic understanding of revelation where, the Qur'an is considered the direct revelation of God, written as soon as it is revealed during the life-time of the Prophet Muhammad, making it immune to the sort of criticism that Hick directs against the Bible. In other words, in the Qur'an's case, there were no authors to put words in the mouth of Muhammad and that it is considered *a* revelation from God, not the recollection of authors.[92] Therefore it is almost impossible for Muslims to apply Hick's mythological approach to the Qur'an. Commenting on the far reaching effects of Hick's approach on other religions, Rose writes:

> Nevertheless, most adherents of most religions will see the pluralistic hypothesis not only as reductionistic and thus derogatory to the visions of religious truth to which they adhere, but also as another form of Western or Christian religious interpretation and reduction to foreign assumptions of what they hold as the deepest truths of life... To escape the consequences of such an interpretation of religions, adherents of religious traditions will likely to continue to believe that the cognitive content of their religious traditions is to be found in their traditional interpretations of the mystery of life and not in a nebulous reference to a postulated Real that is beyond all knowledge and experience."[93]

Despite Hick's modest intentions and best efforts, this understanding of religious language, as Byrne rightly senses, "gives the human subject a heavy input into all cognition, one which increases as we move upward from physical to moral to religious elements of reality,"[94] which I wholeheartedly agree with. Hick replies to Byrne's charge, reminding us that his stance is "certainly not a form of naive realism," rather an "authentic form of critical realism."[95] We are not told, though, how an authentic form of critical realism differs from an inauthentic one. Nevertheless, to me, Hick's shift is more towards non-realism than to critical realism. As will be seen in the following paragraphs, all this discussion will be rendered obsolete when Hick reveals that the contents of the scriptures are not after all very important so long as they orient people towards Reality-centredness. For him, they are "'secondary' packaging and labelling,"[96] which is one step behind non-realists, such as Cupitt and others. In fact, despite Hick's adamant denial of non-realism, some critics point out that his position is non-realist.[97] Hick's attitude

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[92] The recollections of the companions of the Prophet are considered separately among the Prophetic Traditions, *Sunna*.

[93] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 101-2.

[94] Byrne, P, *Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism: Reference and Realism in Religion*, London: Macmillan, 1995, 122, 38-39.

[95] Hick, J, *"Review of Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism: Reference and Realism in Religion,"* Religious Studies 31, 1996, 290.

[96] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 100; *PRP*, 46.

[97] See for example Alston, W P, *"Realism and the Christian Faith,"* International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 38, 1995, 37-60. In this article, Alston takes an issue with Tillich, Kaufman and Hick and describes their position as "irrealism = nonrealism" and concludes that they have no convincing arguments and are just "paper dragons" (57). On the other hand, Eberhard Herrmann chooses Hick as the representative of realism and contrasts his position with Don Cupitt's anti-realism. See, his *"The Trouble with Religious Realism,"* Studia Theologica 50, 1996, 31-50. The two evaluations of Hick's position differ on their approach to Hick's philosophy. Alston focuses on

towards religious doctrines and texts reminds us of the disagreement in hermeneutics between functionalists and revelationists. Hick's pragmatic criterion certainly puts him among "functionalists" who claim that "certain texts are scripture only in so far as they pass certain pragmatic and functional text."[98] Primarily Muslims and certainly followers from other religions will disagree with this definition and the attitude. However, though it may seem an odd coincidence, there are a few orthodox Muslim scholars who also argue along the same lines as Hick. In *Crisis in the Muslim Mind*,[99] Abdul Hammed A AbuSulayman strongly argues that:

> "Any structure of Muslim knowledge, thought, or science that does not provide the Muslim mind with the means to achieve the best possible understanding and performance is not a true Islamic structure or methodology for thought, knowledge, or life."[100]

Naturally, AbuSulayman's thoughts are criticised since, in Mohammed A M Khan's words, they sound like a "recipe for positivism" and tautology.[101]

This brings us to the internal issue of theological reductionism. Hick was quick to realise that the doctrine of Incarnation was "incompatible" with his "Copernican Revolution."[102] In order for his theory to work, it was "necessary to break the ontological identification of Jesus as the Christ with God."[103] What brought Hick to public attention as a pluralist, in fact, was firstly his call for a "Copernican Revolution in Theology,"[104] and secondly the publication of *The Myth of God Incarnate*, as its editor and as a contributor with the article "Jesus and the World Religions."[105]. Both articles are closely

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Hick's treatment of religious teaching and finds his mythological approach irrealist/nonrealist, while Herrmann concentrates on Hick's position towards the existence of a transcendent Ultimate Reality.

[98] Esack, F, *"Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Problems and Prospects,"* The Muslim World 83, no. 2, 1993, 122.

[99] AbuSulayman, A H A, *Crisis in the Muslim Mind*, trans. DeLorenzo, Yusuf T, Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993.

[100] Khan, M A M, *"Review Article: Epistemological Poverty or Poverty of Epistemology,"* The Muslim World 87, no. 1, 1997, 74 (cited from AbuSulayman, *Crisis in the Muslim Mind*, 99).

[101] Khan, *"Epistemological Poverty,"* 74.

[102] Because of the unique importance of Jesus for Christianity, and the major obstacle it presents to against pluralism, we observe Hick trying to develop a consistent understanding of Jesus in line with his arguments. Therefore, we can trace his dealing with Christ as far back as his first book, *Faith and Knowledge* (1957), where he took a traditionalist line of thought (215-236) in his treatment of Jesus. The same major concern continued in subsequent works, especially in *Christianity at the Centre* (1968) (31-49), *God and the Universe of Faiths* (1973) (148-179), *The Centre of Christianity* (1977) (15-33), *God Has Many Names* (1980) (59-79), *The Second Christianity* (1983) (15-33) and *Disputed Questions* (1993) (35-104). His argument reached at its peak in *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (1993), which is one of his latest books. For a detailed development and analysis of Hick's Christology, see: Gillis, C, *A Question of Final Belief: John Hick's Pluralistic Theory of Salvation*, Basingstoke: Macmillan: 1989, Chp. 3; Carruthers, G H, *Christian Theology of World Religions: An Elaboration and Evaluation of the Position of John Hick*, Lanham, New York and London: University Press of America, 1990, Chps. 3 & 4; and Loughlin, G P, *Mirroring God's World: A Critique of John Hick's Speculative Theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University, PhD, 1987, Chp. 5.

[103] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 89.

[104] *GUF*, Chp. 9, 12-132. The article was an extended version of *"The Christian View of Other Faiths,"* Expository Times 64, n. 2, 1972, 36-39, which, as Gillis rightly suggests, marked Hick's departure from the traditional interpretation of Christ (Gillis, *Final Belief*, 78).

[105] The article has been reprinted in *God Has Many Names* (1980) (59-79).

related to Christology. In the latter essay, he starts with the Feuerbachian conception of God as the "projection of human ideals."[106] He then turns his attention to the doctrines of incarnation and resurrection. To prove that Jesus is not the only religious figure to be exalted to the status of divine, he quotes the divination of the founder of Buddhism, Gautama (or Sakyamuni), in the Mahayana Buddhism,[107] to conclude that the exaltation of the founder in each tradition to divinity "led the developing tradition to speak of him in terms which he himself did not use, and to understand him by means of a complex of beliefs which was only gradually formed by later generations of his followers."[108]

Regarding the issue of the resurrection of Jesus, a "significant point of difference between Gautama and Jesus,"[109] he cites the examples of resurrections Jesus himself performed, such as those of Lazarus[110] and Jairus' daughter,[111] and states that Jesus' resurrection "did not automatically put him in a quite unique category. It indicated that he had a special place within God's providence; but this was not equivalent to seeing him as literally divine."[112] As far as the biblical evidence about the divine sonship of Jesus is concerned, Hick relies upon "the son of God terminology"[113] of hermeneutical biblical scholarship to say that the expression was known to the Israelite people. Therefore, he infers that the unique experience of Jesus and his followers relationship to him and to God must have been dogmatised by Nicaea and Chalcedon; thus they are not authentic claims.[114] He contends that the doctrine of Incarnation can be

> "best expressed by saying that the idea of divine incarnation is a mythological idea. And I am using the term 'myth' in the following sense; a myth is a story which is told but which is not literally true, or an idea or image which is applied to someone or something but which does not literally apply, but which invites a particular attitude in its hearers... That Jesus was God the Son incarnate is not literally true, since it has no literal meaning, but it is an application to Jesus of a mythical concept whose function is analogous to that of the notion of divine sonship ascribed in the ancient world to a king."[115]

This was his conclusion then. Sixteen years on little has changed, and he states in *The Metaphor of God Incarnate:*

> "But for most modern Western Christians (including myself) it remains difficult to accept myth as myth. Returning to the crib, and the Christmas story as a whole, we know that it is historically unlikely that Jesus was born on 25 December (the date of a pre-Christian pagan winter festival which Christianity inherited), that the year of his birth was 1 CE (it was more probably about 5 BCE); unlikely that he was born in Bethlehem (which was probably adopted

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[106] *MYGI*, 168.
[107] *MYGI*, 168-169.
[108] *MYGI*, 170.
[109] Gillis, *Final Belief*, 83.
[110] *John* 11: 1-44.
[111] *Mark* 5: 35-43; *Luke* 8: 49-56.
[112] *MYGI*, 171.
[113] Gillis, *Final Belief*, 83.
[114] *MYGI*, 171-178.
[115] *MYGI*, 178.

> into the story to fulfil prophecy), that he had no human father (a mythic theme that became attached to a number of great figures in antiquity); and we have seen reasons to reject the dogma that he was God incarnate (a dogma that Jesus himself would probably have regarded as blasphemous). In view of all this, how does one participate in Christmas?... The alternative is a Christian faith which takes Jesus as our supreme (but not necessarily only) spiritual guide; as our personal and communal lord, leader, guru, exemplar, and teacher, but not as literally himself God; and which sees Christianity as one authentic context of salvation/liberation amongst others, not opposing but interacting in mutually creative ways with the other great paths."[116]

I have two immediate comments on these quotations from a Muslim perspective. One is about Hick's understanding of myth: "a myth is... an image which is applied to someone or something but which does not literally apply, but which invites a particular attitude in its hearers"[117] It struck me as soon as I read the paragraph that this definition approves idolatrous practices, a very sensitive issue within Muslim circles. For a Muslim, this description is hard to come to terms with, due to the fact that it renders the work of prophet Muhammad among the pagan Arabs to nothing. Both the Qur'an and the historians of Islam make it crystal clear that pagan Arabs had an idea of a monotheistic god, Allah; on that front, Muhammad did not bring anything new. Their major problem was how to approach this strictly monotheistic god. They thought that idols were the appropriate means to worship Allah, which they claimed brought them near to Him. To abolish this idolatry, indeed, was Muhammad's first priority. According to Hick's logic, he should not have abolished the idols, since they produce the right attitudes in the hearer. C Smith produces a positive outlook towards idolatry in his excellent article, *"Idolatry,"* [118] by claiming that it could be seen as a positive way of worshipping God, or achieving salvation/liberation in Hick's account. Specifically addressing the issue of "idol-worship," Smith quotes from one of his earlier works: "No one has ever worshipped an idol. Some have worshipped God in the form of an idol; that is what idols are for."[119] He also cites from "the amîr 'Abd al-Qâdir (ibn Muhyî-d-Dîn al-Hasanî)"[120] to bolster his contention. I have tremendous respect for the authority of C Smith, but these views represent a very tiny minority of the Islamic world; even if it may be true to the spirit of the Qur'an, the majority think otherwise.

My second concern is about the virgin birth: not the event itself, but its wider implications for the authenticity of Qur'anic teaching, if the Hickian interpretation is taken to be true. Muslims do believe that, according to the Qur'an, Jesus was born without a father. It is very unlikely that they will surrender this literal understanding,

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[116] *MEGI*, 161-163.
[117] *MYGI*, 178.
[118] Smith, W C, *"Idolatry: A Comparative Perspective,"* in The Myth of Christian Uniqueness. Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions, eds., Hick, J and P F Knitter, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987, 53-68.
[119] Smith, *"Idolatry,"* 53.
[120] Smith, *"Idolatry,"* 66-67, n. 1.

since it will not be understood as a problem of interpretation by many of the mainstream scholars. Rather they consider it as a test of the truthfulness of the Qur'anic revelation. As S Hossein Nasr puts it forcefully: "Islam will never accept that its Christology is false... It is He [Allah] who revealed to Muslims that an Islamic doctrine of Christ. If certain verses of the Qur'an like those of Surat Maryam [referring to Virgin Birth] are incorrect, then by what criterion should Muslims accept the rest of the Qur'an?"[121] Fazlur Rahman also makes similar remarks about Muslim Christology.[122] However, as we shall see in the following chapter, Islamic Christology is not as rigid as these scholars suggest. Mahmoud Ayoub's efforts of constructing an Islamic Christology, which respects both Islamic and Christian understandings, worth mentioning.[123]

But surely Hick's critical realism expects a critical understanding from the followers of all great traditions towards the conflicting truth-claims. This may backfire though, and Rose accurately exposes this difficulty when he says:

> "This is a serious fault of the pluralistic hypothesis since not many adherents of specific religions would likely, upon reflection, agreeably allow their beliefs, or interpretation of the mystery of existence, to be subjected to the reductionism inherent in Hick's pluralistic hypothesis. Nor would they likely agree that the noumenal Real is the *true* intention of the various vocabularies that they employ in their dealings with the mystery of existence."[124]

The second downgrading in Hick's epistemology is the test of truthfulness of religions. Hick's understanding of religious language also requires him to determine the truth or falsity of any given religious proposition on condition that it evokes an "appropriate dispositional attitude to"[125] the Real, i.e. the transformation from self-centredness to Reality-centredness. Thus he states that "the truthfulness of a myth is... a practical truthfulness, consisting in its capacity to orient us rightly in our lives."[126]

When questioned about whether his reinterpretation of problematic religious doctrines resembles at all the "doctrines held in the respected traditions;" he replies: "yes and no." He maintains that yes, the conflicting truth-claims of the religions are left "intact within their own traditions," but no, because they become partial truths as "different human responses to the Real,"[127] i.e. true metaphorically as far as the phenomenal Real is concerned, but untrue in the case of the noumenal Real. So Hick first reinterprets the religious language as mythical and symbolic and then restricts it within the boundaries of

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[121] Nasr, S H, *"Response to Hans Kung's Paper on Christian-Muslim Dialogue,"* The Muslim World 77, 1987, 100.
[122] Rahman, F, *"A Muslim Response: Christian Particularity and the Faith of Islam,"* in Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World, ed. Dawe, D G and J B Carman, New York, Maryknoll: Orbis Books: 1986, 78.
[123] See: Ayoub, M M, *"Towards an Islamic Christology: An Image of Jesus in Early Shi'i Muslim Literature,"* The Muslim World 66, no. 3, 1976 and *"Towards an Islamic Christology, II: The Death of Jesus, Reality or Delusion (A Study of the Death of Jesus in Tafsir Literature),"* The Muslim World 70, no. 2, 1980.
[124] Rose, *Knowing the Real,* 100.
[125] *AIR*, 348.
[126] *ROF*, 51.
[127] *ROF*, 42.

the phenomenal Real. In other words, he first gives them a modified language which has very little to do with religious realism of the relevant traditions, and lets the religious believers apply this pruned language to their now downgraded and localised gods. If one can call this an "authentic response," it can only be so for Hick and like-minded pluralists, but not for the followers of the respected religions. When he was reminded that it sounds a "pretty radical reinterpretation," he leaves us with an either-or dilemma: "We do really have to make a choice between a one-tradition absolutism and a genuinely pluralistic interpretation of the global religious situation."[128]

There are also the questions relating to what an appropriate response is and how transformation from ego-centredness to the Reality-centredness occurs for the world religions. To resolve the issue, Hick sticks to the *Golden Rule*: "it is good to benefit others and evil to harm them."[129] He also believes that the rule is common to all great world religions as the reflection of "love, compassion, generous concern for and commitment to the welfare of others."[130] Although I have no objection to the Golden Rule, I have difficulty in differentiating between fiction and scripture, since they may both evoke the right attitudes in one and guide one towards the Golden Rule. What makes the scriptures different from fiction? We have not been given any indication. In fact, Hick may not even have such a distinction, since he does not have a definition of religion. However this seems to me mere ethicism rather than a religious reinterpretation of religion.[131] As Unamuno stresses, for Kant and for Hick too, "morality is the basis of eschatology,"[132] i.e. the best way to achieve salvation/liberation. This may be true for many religions in general, but I wonder if it adequately reflects the complex structure of every religion, at least the ones Hick is concerned with. I believe it overlooks the ritual aspect of religion, to which I shall come back in the next chapter.

Leading to the above conclusion is Hick's conviction that doctrinal differences between religions are not, after all "soteriologically vital."[133] Embarking on a borrowed Buddhistic principle, "undetermined questions,"[134] Hick "views doctrines as a kind of 'secondary' packaging and labelling,"[135] which results in the subordination of "what is different between the religions to what he thinks is common to them."[136] So in the final analysis, Hick thinks it does not matter what we believe in; so long as we have the Golden Rule and behave accordingly, we are on the right path to achieve salvation/liberation.

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[128] *ROF*, 43.
[129] *AIR*, 313-314, 316.
[130] *AIR*, 316; see for more *AIR*, 316-340.
[131] For a similar claim by K Ward see *"Divine Ineffability,"* in God, Truth and Reality: Essays in Honour of John Hick, ed. Sharma, A, New York: St Martin's Press: 1993, 215.
[132] Unamuno, M de, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, London and Glasgow: Collins/Fontana Library, 1962, 24.
[133] *AIR*, 367.
[134] *AIR*, Chp. 19, 343-361; *ROF*, 52-56.
[135] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 100; *PRP*, 46.
[136] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 100.

Throughout his study of religions, Hick is trying to establish a fine balance between, on the one hand, a critical realism and on the other, a mythical, metaphorical and symbolic understanding of religion. To me, Hick loses the argument by being either a religious reductionist or a "transcendental agnostic."[137] So on the issue of religious epistemology as an explanation of religious diversity, Hick's reductionist argument should be rejected since it does justice neither to the beliefs of particular religious followers nor their scriptures. The idea of a critical realism is quite vague since it leaves us with nothing but an empty shell; which is not far away from the naturalistic or non-realist understanding of religion. I concur with Rose[138] that the reductionist attitude implicit in Hick's pluralism will most likely result in the theory's widespread rejection by the adherents of the major world religions. One of the main problems in this picture is the postulated noumenal Real, which I will examine in the forthcoming chapter.

4.4. The Real *an sich*

As noted earlier, one of the most distinctive features of Hick's later hypothesis is his adoption of Kantian epistemology by distinguishing between *the Real as in itself* and *as humanly expressed and experienced* as the object of religion. This is, one may suggest, one of the most controversial and much-discussed aspects of Hick's theory. For many, the initial reaction was to reject this distinction owing to the fact that Hick was trying to introduce a formal-transcendental concept, the Real, above and beyond the range of all human religious experience. However, as shown in the previous chapter, Hick has always maintained that the distinction, more readily available as "formlessness" in Eastern religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc., has been also existent in other major religious traditions, especially "within the mystical strands of Judaism, Islam" and Christianity.[139] Nevertheless, the introduction of the Real an sich creates more problems for Hick than he tries to solve.[140] To begin with, as Rose accurately points out, Hick does not clearly address the question of transcendentality or causality vis-à-vis the Real. That is, it is not clear whether we need the Real as the main cause of the human religious activity or as a necessary transcendental postulate for the religious experience of humankind or both. Secondly, there are problems related to the issue of ineffability and reference: how can we refer to something if it cannot be expressed or experienced directly. If it cannot be

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[137] D'Costa, *John Hick's*, 162, 167, 170.
[138] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 101-2.
[139] *AIR*, 236-239; *ROF*, 57-58.
[140] Keith Ward, for instance, confirming this conclusion writes:

> "... first, that it leads us to regard all objects of religious experience as illusory or subjective in some sense; whereas believers want to make claims to objectivity, however inadequate. Second, it leads us to renounce all claims to knowledge of noumenal reality; whereas most believers wish to claim some knowledge of ultimate reality - again, even if inadequately conceived. In other words, the Kantian distinction turns disputes about the relative adequacy of interpretations of reality into wholly unresolvable claims about a completely unknowable reality. In fact, if reality is completely unknowable, no cognitive claims can be made about it at all; so religion inevitably becomes a wholly subjective matter of personal attitudes."

(Ward, K, *"Divine Ineffability,"* in God, Truth and Reality: Essays in Honour of John Hick, ed. Sharma, A, New York: St Martin's Press: 1993, 215).

referred to, then there are some who question the need for the Real an sich in Hick's hypothesis. We shall deal with these questions in turn.

4.4.1. Between Transcendentality and Causality

This is a question developed particularly by Rose in his book *Knowing the Real.*[141] Rose thinks that it is inconsistent and incoherent on Hick's part to hold that the Real *an sich* is both transcendental and causal. Hick sometimes perceives the noumenal Real as the "necessary postulate" of religious experience when he says, in response to the question of why we need the Real:

> "The answer is that the divine noumenon is a necessary postulate of the pluralistic religious life of humanity. For within each tradition we regard as real the object of our worship or contemplation... we are led to postulate the Real *an sich* as the presupposition of the veridical character of this range of forms of religious experience. Without this postulate we should be left with a plurality of *personae* and *impersonae* each of which is claimed to be the Ultimate, but no one of which alone can be."[142]

On the other hand, Hick also establishes a causal correlation between the noumenal Real and religious experience:

> "We have affirmed the noumenal Real as the necessary presupposition of the religious life. Trusting in the basically veridical character of the stream of religious experience and thought in which we participate, and extending that acceptance at least to the other major streams, we have postulated the Real as the ground of this varied realm of religious phenomena. Indeed we have already committed ourselves to such a postulate in rejecting the view of religious experience as simply human projection. For to deny that possibility is to affirm that the divine *personae* and metaphysical *impersonae* are not only shaped (as is evident) by the categories of human thought but express at the same time the presence and impact of a transcendental reality. We are thus led to affirm a noumenal ultimate reality of which the objects of religious experience are phenomenal manifestations."[143]

Rose contends that Hick aims at a double benefit by introducing the noumenal Real in his hypothesis. Firstly, he seeks to transform the "otherwise neutral or nonreligious phenomenological accounts of the life of religious communities" "into *religious* interpretations, thus distinguishing them from nonreligious, noncognitive, and functional interpretations of religion."[144] Secondly, Hick would like also to "prevent noncognitive or functionalist explanatory or interpretive strategies... from negating or ignoring the essential reliance of lived religion and religious interpretations of religion upon a transcendental divine reality."[145]

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[141] Rose, *Knowing the Real,* 106-110.
[142] *AIR*, 249.
[143] *AIR*, 350.
[144] Rose, *Knowing the Real,* 106.
[145] Rose, *Knowing the Real,* 106.

Rose, however, finds this a quite problematic and paradoxical interchange, since he maintains that "causality cannot be predicate of a transcendental postulate, which is merely a notional entity."[146] The paradox lies in the fact that "a causal agent... cannot at the same time be a transcendental postulate,"[147] which is what Hick is claiming for the noumenal Real. He further remarks that "Hick not only slides back and forth between these contrary ways of conceiving the noumenal Real, he often conflates them in the same sentence or paragraph, thereby creating an unanalysed confusion of transcendental and causal conceptions of the noumenal Real."[148] It is inconsistent, Rose suggests, to claim *"manifestations"* for a transcendentally postulated being, e.g. the Real *an sich*, on the one hand and on the other, to hold that it "*effects* schematizations *of itself*" through human cognition and "culture," despite the fact that it cannot be experienced.[149] To substantiate his claim, Rose cites Hick:

> "Since we can never experience the unexperienced [the noumenal Real] we can never compare the world as it appears in consciousness with the postulated world as it exists independently of its impact upon our human sensory and nervous systems. But we know that we are able to survive, and indeed to flourish, as physical entities moving about in a physical world with which our bodies intermesh in a single causal system."[150]

We know too that Hick's departure point is the empirical veridicality of our religious experiences, which in turn depends on their fruits in the lives of believers. Evidently, Hick also holds that the idea of an "ultimate divine noumenon is arrived at inductively."[151] Rose makes two startling comments regarding this. One asks that "how something to which the notion of cause does not apply can have an impact,"[152] upon us and the other inquires that how a "transcendental postulate" can become "the product of an empirical doctrine?"[153] Rose's answer to these questions is that apart from being a "spurious speculative, theoretical assurance to the one who has religious experience that such experience is not an illusion," the noumenal Real can be "neither the veiled object nor the partial cause of religious experience."[154] In conclusion, Rose sets forth Hick's task as follows:

> "The most fundamental question to address to Hick at this point is this: Does he intend that the noumenal Real should be understood as simply an entity necessitated by the transcendental logic of his quasi-Kantian reliance upon the noumenon/phenomenon distinction, which then serves as the sole guarantor of the cognitivity of religions? Or does he

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[146] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 107.
[147] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 107.
[148] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 107. For this sort of usage, see *AIR*, 134-35, 165, 169, 200, 243, 244, 350.
[149] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 107.
[150] *AIR*, 134-135.
[151] *PRP*, 97. See also *PRP* 37, 97, 103-104, 106; *ROF*, 50.
[152] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 108.
[153] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 109.
[154] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 109.

> intend that the noumenal Real be understood as partial cause, along with the biological processes of cognition and also of culture, of religious experience?"[155]

In order to make it a tenable and "defensible" theory, Rose's solution to Hick's dilemma is to suggest that if Hick seeks to avoid the criticisms levelled against his theory, he should first abandon both the idea that "the noumenal Real is... an element in a transcendental logic justifying *a priori* a religious over against a nonreligious interpretation of religions"[156] and also his "quasi-Kantian" "noumenon/phenomenon distinction." Secondly, he should give a more *causal* role to the noumenal Real as a "factor in the generation of religious experience," which is supported by the "traditional mystical interpretations of the diversity of religious experience."[157] This, Rose believes, is also in line with "Hick's rejection of the traditional and modern attempts to prove the existence of God," and his claim instead that "it is reasonable for a religious person to trust her own personal experience," which proves to be, in Rose's understanding, "the best promising strand... for developing a pluralistic hypothesis that can account for the plurality of religions as well as their cognitivity, their claim for veridicality."[158]

What can be said about Rose's interesting and stimulating remarks about the exact nature of the noumenal Real? Perhaps I could start by pointing out a few problems with Rose's criticisms. His claim that the noumenal Real is a purely transcendental postulate does not necessitate the conclusion that there can be no causal relationship between the noumenal Real and its manifestations in religious traditions. Hick's concern has always been the detachment of the noumenal Real from human conceptions and terms.[159] Hick writes:

> "It is not a *thing* because it transcends all our thing-concepts, including our religious thing-concepts. But on the other hand it is not nothing; it is that reality in virtue of which, through our response to one or other of its manifestations as the God figures or the non-personal Absolutes, we can arrive at the blessed unselfcentred state which is our highest good."[160]

Again, when he is questioned about the possibility of the noumenal Real possessing attributes "analogous to goodness and love," he refuses to concede this because it would violate the "principle that any comprehensive interpretation of religion must take account of all the major traditions, and not just of one's own."[161] Another reason for his resistance is that when considering all personae and impersonae analogous attributes of the Real, it "leads to manifest contradictions." And "the more you add to the list the more incoherent it becomes."[162] So Hick's conclusion is that:

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[155] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 109.
[156] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 109.
[157] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 109.
[158] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, n. 32, 124.
[159] Certainly one can question whether this is the best way of dealing with the seemingly conflicting truth-claims of religions which I shall be wrestling with in the following section. For now, though, our concern is transcendentality and causality of the Real.
[160] *ROF*, 60.
[161] *ROF*, 61-62.
[162] *ROF*, 62.

> "... rather than get into such a morass of impossibilities it seems to me that we should acknowledge that all these attributes are components of our human conceptual repertoire. But a comprehensive interpretation of religion requires us to postulate an ultimate reality which exceeds that conceptual repertoire, and is thus from our point of view ineffable or formless. It has its own nature, presumably infinite in richness, but that nature is not thinkable in our human terms -and indeed even the concept of a nature, or an essence, belongs to the network of human concepts which the Real totally transcends."[163]

As I see it, Rose is mistaken in his belief that because the Real transcends our concepts, it cannot affect us and our environment in any way. However, I believe that an entity can be both transcendental and causal at the same time. This should not certainly be taken to mean that the Real is like the unmoved Mover of Aristotle. Contrary to what Rose implies,[164] neither does it suggest that just because it transcends everything we can think of does not mean that it is invented *a priori* out of nothing to overcome the theoretical difficulties. Indeed, one can even say that whether we postulate it or not, the noumenal Real exists independently of us. Or to take it a step further, who can guarantee that the God of Jesus, of Muhammad and of Buddha is different?[165] The question surely is: what is the evidence? In Hick's case it is our experience, and hence the conclusion is inductively reached. But how can one be sure that this is the case? Hick's answer is that no-one can, because on the personal level there is no overwhelming evidence that Christians are better human beings than Muslims or Hindus or vice versa, while on the global level things could be interpreted both religiously and non-religiously. This leads Hick to the conclusion that the religious nature of the universe is ambiguous: everybody can find in it "proof" to support his/her argument.[166] An evolutionary biologist like Richard Dawkins can see it developing on its own through natural forces without the hand of God, whereas a theist could argue that the universe is governed and sustained by an all-loving God. Whichever is true, we will find out in the hereafter.

I cannot see a real contradiction in Hick's understanding of the noumenal Real as both transcendental and causal. To me, this does not pose a serious challenge Hick's theory. I do, however, have problems with his understanding of the ineffability of the noumenal Real, which I shall begin to examine next.

4.4.2. The Ineffability and Redundancy of the Noumenal Real

In approaching the problem of ineffability, I would like to deal first with the question of identity. Supposing that Hick might be right in claiming that all the great world traditions point to an ultimate Reality, what makes him so sure that it is the same Reality that they point to? Could not there be separate, ineffable, ultimate realities?

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[163] *ROF*, 62.
[164] Rose's understanding of transcendence seems to be closely related to the Platonist view of transcendence.
[165] As we have seen earlier (150-1), Verkamp in fact supports Hick by suggesting that they are not different (Verkamp, *"Hick's Interpretation of Religious Pluralism,"* 113).
[166] *AIR*, 122-124.

Keith Ward agrees with Hick in his assertion that ineffability is one of the common features of the Ultimate in many traditions. However, he thinks that "it may seem a short move from saying that two ideas are of an ineffable reality to saying that they are of the same reality; for what could distinguish two ineffables?"[167]

If *A* and *B* are "indescribable" by someone, Ward argues, "it does not follow that" the two are "identical." "On the contrary, there is no way in which" *A* and *B* can be identified with each other, "since there are no criteria of identity to apply... If I do not know what either is, I *ipso facto* do not know whether they are the same or different."[168] Hick, according to Ward, in fact commits "the quantifier-shift fallacy," where he moves from "many religions believe in an ineffable Real" to "there is an ineffable Real in which many religions believe."[169] Hick concedes that he would accept "the quantifier-shift fallacy," if he were to use such an argument. However, he argues that his reasoning is rather different and therefore the charge is not valid. He puts his case forward:

> "My reason to assume that the different world religions are referring, through their specific concepts of the Gods and Absolutes, to the same ultimate Reality is the striking similarity of the transformed human state described within the different traditions as saved, redeemed, enlightened, wise, awakened, liberated. This similarity strongly suggests a common source of salvific transformation. So it seems to me that the most reasonable hypothesis is that of a single ultimate ground of all human salvific transformation, rather than of a plurality of such grounds."[170]

Ward, nevertheless, dismisses Hick's "simplicity" argument,[171] i.e. the claim that identification of different concepts of God fits better than the separation of them, or the bid to find "the simplest hypothesis" to describe the diversity of religious experience and thought of humankind.[172] Ward rightly questions Hick's reasoning to claim simplicity instead of complexity as an attribute of the ultimate reality,[173] a point which is also raised by P L Quinn. Quinn holds that one might repudiate (indeed "some philosophers of science do") the claim that "theoretical simplicity is indicative of truth, viewing it instead as a merely pragmatic virtue."[174] Hence Ward infers that one is "not entitled to assert

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[167] Ward, K, *"Truth and the Diversity of Religions,"* 5.
[168] Ward, K, *"Truth and the Diversity of Religions,"* 5.
[169] Ward, K, *"Truth and the Diversity of Religions,"* 5.
[170] *ROF*, 69.
[171] *AIR*, 248-249; *ROF*, 69.
[172] *AIR*, 248.
[173] G I Mavrodes also criticises Hick severely on this point in *"A Response to John Hick"* (Faith and Philosophy 14, no. 3, 1997, 292):

> "But isn't it hard to see how something which is described *only* by the *via negative* - 'not this, not that'- could provide at all, simple or otherwise, for any positive data? The religious life of the world is amazingly resistant and resilient. The religions of the world are surprisingly diverse... They produce actual human characters of profound beauty and goodness. These are facts (or so, at least, it seems to me). What could account for such facts?"

[174] Quinn, P L, *"Towards Thinner Theologies: Hick and Alston on Religious Diversity,"* International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 38, 1995, 152. Interestingly enough, Hick suggests on another occasion that he seeks to "complicate our understanding by distinguishing between the Real as it is in itself, independently of human cognizers, and the Real as humanly experienced in a range of different ways" (Hick, J, *"Religious Pluralism and the Divine: A Response to Paul Eddy,"*

identity or difference of ineffable objects"[175] when there is no other compelling evidence to do so. Ward concludes: "There does not seem to be much hope of uniting all traditions around even the rather short creed of one ineffable reality. They may say there is no such reality; or that there are more than one; or that it is not ineffable."[176] It should be noted, however, that Ward, as a fellow Christian pluralist, is not arguing on these grounds for the impossibility of the pluralist stance. His point is rather directly related to Hick's notion of an ineffable noumenal Real as the grounding source of all religious experience. We will see Ward's solution to Hick's predicament towards the end of this section, where he proposes a moderate notion of ineffability compatible with some descriptions of the Real provided by the great religions.

Now we can move on to the problem of ineffability of the noumenal Real as such. In a recent article to defend his position and to respond to its critics, Hick writes:

> "The Real is thus not experienced as it is in itself, but is postulated to satisfy (a) the basic faith that human religious experience is not purely projection but is at the same time a response to a transcendent reality or realities, and (b) the observation that Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism etc. which are communal responses to these different gods and absolutes, seem to be more or less equally effective contexts of human transformation from self-centredness, with all the evils and miseries that flow from this, to a recentering in the Transcendent as experienced within one's own tradition"[177]

Having considered a few analogies to show the relation between the Real as it is and as humanly experienced, he concludes:

> "There can indeed be no true analogy for the unique relationship between the postulated ultimate, ineffable, reality the universal presence of which gives rise, in collaboration with the our human spiritual practices and conceptual schemes, to the range of forms of religious experience reported in the history of religions."[178]

This is a typical Hickian statement to picture the diversity of religions while maintaining that:

i. the religious experience of humankind is not an illusion but a response to a transcendent reality,

ii. the great world religions are more or less equally effective ways of salvation/liberation,

iii. yet, as the basis of all these, the Real lies beyond the grasp of human 'language-games,' i.e. it is totally *ineffable*. That is to say, unlike the traditionally known moderate

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Religious Studies 31, 1995, 420). This, however, in my opinion seems to be a different complexity than the one mentioned in the paragraph. In this sense complexity is to widen our understanding of the Real from locality to universality.

[175] Ward, K, *"Truth and the Diversity of Religions,"* 5-6.

[176] Ward, K, *"Truth and the Diversity of Religions,"* 6.

[177] Hick, J, *"The Epistemological Challenge of Religious Pluralism,"* Faith and Philosophy. 14, no. 3, 1997, 284-285.

[178] Hick, J, *"The Epistemological Challenge of Religious Pluralism,"* 284-285.

ineffability where religious language relates to the Real, in Hick's theory, there is a complete discontinuity between the Real as it is and our experience and understanding of it.

The connection between the first two premises is not difficult to establish. But linking the third to them is the hardest thing for Hick. Hence the ineffability of the noumenal Real constitutes one of the major obstacles against the pluralistic hypothesis. As Ward notes, three major questions come to mind immediately vis-à-vis the ineffability of the Real proposed by Hick: "If the Real is ineffable, how can one know that it exists? If no truth-claim can apply to it, how can one be entitled to say anything of it? And if this reality is unknowable, how can we know that all claims about it are equally valid, except in the sense that all are completely mistaken?"[179] I should point out at this stage that if the Real is totally ineffable, I do not think we can even *know* that "all claims are completely mistaken." What Ward would be meaning here is that we could *speculate* about or *suspect* that religious language might be just an illusion or a "language game." Otherwise the claim of illusion cannot really be an exception to the general ineffability of the Real in the sense that "we can definitely be sure that they are mistaken." I believe strong ineffability does not allow this certainty of knowledge either negatively or positively, but both are possibilities.

The main problem with Hick's ineffability is that, to use K Yandell's expression, he supports "strong ineffability"[180] of the Real as opposed to a moderate version. Nonetheless, he starts with the basic traditional doctrine of ineffability (that is moderate, i.e. God *a se* and God *pro nobis* in Christianity), which he thinks is evidently existent in other great religious traditions as well.[181] Hick is certainly aware of the difficulties associated with strong ineffability, but he sees them as "logical pedantries" which should not be worried about.[182]

After the dismissal of "logical pedantries," Hick goes on to emphasise the classical distinction between "substantial" and "purely formal and logically generated properties" to back up his argument about the total ineffability of the Real *an sich*.[183] His claim is that while substantial properties like "being good, being powerful," and "having

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[179] Ward, K, *"Truth and the Diversity of Religions," Religious Studies* 26, 1990, 5.
[180] *AIR*, 239 (cited from Yandell, K E, *"Some Varieties of Ineffability,"* International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 6, no. 3, 1975, 172).
[181] *AIR*, 236-240.
[182] *AIR*, 239.
[183] For some reason -possibly technical- in a footnote replying to P Eddy in 1995, Hick expressed his willingness to use W Alston's terminology, which differentiates between "extrinsic" and "intrinsic" attributes of God, instead of the traditional differentiation of formal and substantial attributes (Hick, J, *"Religious Pluralism and the Divine,"* 418, n. 4). According to this division, Alston considers "predicates" that "'do not tell us' anything about the subject -about the nature or operations of the subject" as *"negative"* or *"extrinsic,"* whereas "predicates" that "'tell us something' about such matters" as "intrinsic" (Alston, W P, *Divine Nature and Human Language*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989, 40). I have not found any trace of this change in Hick's subsequent writings, though I am sceptical about whether it makes any positive contribution in Hick's argument.

knowledge," do not apply to the Real *an sich*,[184] purely formal and logical properties such as "being a referent of a term and being such that our substantial concepts do not apply" do belong to the noumenal Real.[185] He also wishes to gather support from *"via negativa* (or *via remotionis)*"[186] by stating that the distinction paves the way to say that the Real "lies beyond the range of all our positive substantial characterisations. It is in this qualified sense that it makes perfectly good sense to say that our substantial concepts do not apply to the Ultimate."[187]

Hick's appeal to the long established tradition of *via negativa* in Christianity seems to be misleading, since it does not actually assert the total "lack of knowledge" of God,[188] as Ward points out:

> "We get to the notion of Divine ineffability by starting with the power and wisdom of a personal creator, as seen in the world; or by starting with a personal creator, as seen in the world; or by starting with personal experience of a presence which seems to be both awe-inspiring and mysterious. Only when we qualify these initial concepts by successively denying all limitations on the creator and denying the adequacy of all specific descriptive terms to characterise the object of our experience do we come to say that God is ineffable. In other words, the idea of 'the ineffable God' is not simply the idea of something totally unknowable... it is essential to theism to claim that one *knows* the ineffable God; one is acquainted with what is beyond understanding... this idea of ineffable is not just of some ineffable thing or other; it is the idea of an ineffable *God;* that is, of a creator truly known to us in experience, yet whose essential nature transcends our understanding."[189]

Hick's ineffability is certainly "far more radical... than that proposed even by such a radical ineffabilist as Dionysius the Aeropagite (c. 500)," who in his *Mystical Theology* even "negates negation itself."[190] Despite his radical proposal of ineffability, Rose points out, Pseudo-Dionysius sees *via affirmativa* as playing a complementary role to *via negativa*, a relation which Hick's "apophaticism fails to acknowledge."[191] Ward makes the same point when he says that Hick "has taken the doctrine of the *via negativa* out of relation to its complementary doctrine of the *via eminentia*, to produce a new doctrine

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[184] *AIR*, 239.
[185] *AIR*, 239, 246, 352.
[186] Hick cites Aquinas: "We are unable to apprehend [the divine substance] by knowing what it is. Yet we are able to have some knowledge of it by knowing what it is not" (*S.c.G.*, I:14:2- Pegis 1955, 96) (*AIR*, 239).
[187] *AIR*, 239.
[188] Ward, *"Truth and the Diversity of Religions,"* 6.
[189] Ward, K, *"Divine Ineffability,"* 211. Confirming this position elsewhere, Ward declares that "the traditional doctrine of ineffability arises from the exploration of the greatness and infinity of God. It presupposes the truth of many descriptive statements; indeed, it entails at least one descriptive statement, namely, that God is ineffable (a proposition which is not self-evident)" (*"Truth and the Diversity of Religions,"* 9).
[190] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 111.
[191] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 111; *AIR*, 247.

that the Real *an sich is* wholly unknowable."[192] This results, as Rose observes, in "the incoherence of the pluralistic hypothesis."[193]

Then there is the troubled relationship between substantial and logical properties, despite Hick's quick dismissal of the question as "logical pedantry." Rose deems Hick's distinction "unworkable, since we don't seem to be able to say anything at all about that to which *no* substantial properties apply."[194] In fact, we are desperately in need of help from substantial properties to be able to "identify that to which the logical properties supposedly apply."[195] Thus, Rose contends, Hick's purely formal and logical properties such as "being able to be referred to" are "substantial properties in disguise."[196] Ward fully exposes this difficulty when he says that "if *X* has the property of being able to be referred to, this reference must be accomplished either by ostentation or description."[197] We have only one option, "description," since "ostentation is ruled out" for transcendent objects. Thus "*X* must be identified as 'the *X* which...'" Additionally, Ward warns us that a successful "identifying reference" requires "to pick out *X* as some sort of substance, process or stuff." Therefore it is not satisfactory to say, as Hick does, "'the *X* which exists beyond universe,' if there may be such things. One will need to say, '*X* is the one and only thing which satisfies the properties...'"[198] In this sense, Ward considers Hick's generic term "the Real" a failure, since he believes that for Hick "*X* is the one and only thing which is real in the fullest sense," which is "independent, self-existent, unchanging in its essential nature, unlimited by anything else..."[199] This means that "for it even to have a meaning, it is apparent that quite a lot of our concepts do need to apply to *X*."[200] So the distinction between logical and substantial properties cannot be used to defend the view that since the noumenal Real transcends all our human concepts, it can only be spoken of in purely logical properties. Ward likens this position to "doing Logic with nothing but *p*'s and *q*'s:" setting out "possible argument-forms without actually uttering an argument."[201] Rose argues similarly, concluding that Hick's ineffable noumenal Real is nothing but a "formal place holder, empty of all content, incongruously taken as the superexcellent ground and referent of all the substantial properties that the religions ascribe to their divine realities."[202]

W J Wainwright expresses, furthermore, the inappropriateness of the distinction between logical and substantial properties of the noumenal Real. He exemplifies the issue by taking up the property of "goodness," as a common feature to all religions. He

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[192] Ward, *"Truth and the Diversity of Religions,"* 11.
[193] Rose, *Knowing the Real,* 112.
[194] Rose, *Knowing the Real,* 110.
[195] Rose, *Knowing the Real,* 110.
[196] Rose, *Knowing the Real,* 110-111.
[197] Ward, *"Truth and the Diversity of Religions,"* 9.
[198] Ward, *"Truth and the Diversity of Religions,"* 9.
[199] Ward, *"Truth and the Diversity of Religions,"* 9.
[200] Ward, *"Truth and the Diversity of Religions,"* 9-10.
[201] Ward, *"Truth and the Diversity of Religions,"* 10.
[202] Rose, *Knowing the Real,* 110.

suggests that if experience is the starting point in our awareness of the Real, "why can't we say that it *is* (literally) good?" since "*all* the great traditions experience the Real as good."[203] He continues to reveal the paradox in Hick's discourse:

> "Since the Real transcends *all* human concepts, it transcends our concepts of good and evil. So even though the religions agree that the Real is (literally) good, we must deny that it is. The Real is good only in the sense that it is the ground of the change from self-centredness to blessedness. Hick's view is thus similar to Maimonides': God (or the Real) is good in the sense that it 'causes' goodness. But Hick needn't draw this conclusion. Goodness may not be a formal property but it isn't clearly 'substantive' either. It is a *second* order property that supervenes on first order substantive properties."[204]

So the way out for Hick, Wainwright proposes, is to "modify his position" and adopt the view that "the Real is literally good," a position quite close to Ward's as will be seen later in this section. Apparently Wainwright thinks that this would not contradict the ineffability of the Real and would be in line with Hick's other views. This modification also grants Hick the additional benefit of "silencing one common criticism -that since, for all we know, the Real might be evil, we have no reason to think that love and compassion are more appropriate responses to it than hatred or cruelty."[205]

Paul Eddy unearths another discontinuity between Kantian epistemology and Hick's application of it to pluralism. In discussing what led Kant to postulate the "strictly unknowable" noumenon in addition to "phenomenal apprehension,"[206] Eddy quotes Stephen R Palmquist:

> "it would be impossible to give any plausible account of the source of 'the empirical differences in shapes and sizes' of the objects of everyday experience... Only what is common to all representations is, for Kant, supplied a priori by the subject in the act of representing. So the thing itself must be posited and assumed to determine in some sense the raw material for any possible object of knowledge."[207]

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[203] Wainwright, W J, *"Review of The Rainbow of Faiths,"* International Journal for the Philosophy of Religions 42, 1997, 125.
However, Hick writes a few pages earlier that he accepts the corrections of K Ward (*"Truth and the Diversity of Religions,"* 10) and P Eddy (*"Religious Pluralism and the Divine,"* 472) that it is "not a good example... of a purely formal concept" *ROF*, 60.

[204] Wainwright, *"Review of The Rainbow of Faiths,"* 125. Even though Wainwright's thoughts in this paragraph are interesting, I disagree with his reasoning as stated below, because it contradicts Ward's remarks above:

> "Just as we know that something is capable of being referred to without knowing anything about it other than that it has the properties it must have to be an object of reference, so we can know that something is good while knowing nothing of its nature except that it has those properties it must have to be good. We can thus know that the Real is good without knowing what the Real is in itself" (p. 125).

[205] Wainwright, *"Review of The Rainbow of Faiths,"* 126.

[206] Eddy, P R, *"Religious Pluralism and the Divine: Another look at John Hick's Neo-Kantian Proposal,"* Religious Studies 30, 1994, 477.

[207] Eddy, *"Religious Pluralism and the Divine,"* 477 (cited from Palmquist, S R, *Kant's System of Perspectives: An Architectonic Interpretation of the Critical Philosophy*, Lanham, University Press of America, 1993, 169-170, 176-177).

Eddy notes that in Hick's case such a reason is not available owing to the fact that "Hick's subject based categories themselves... contribute significantly to the supposed 'raw material' of religious experience."[208] Eddy maintains that for Hick to be able to explain the religious phenomenon, unlike Kant, "there is *nothing* residual that *requires* the postulation of an 'unknowable' (divine) noumenon."[209] Indeed, Eddy asserts that "everything can be adequately explained, via the human form/category-analogues...without the noumenon."[210]

With the postulation of an unknowable ineffable divine noumenon, Hick's thesis becomes more vulnerable to challenges posed by sceptics like David Hume and non-realist interpreters of religion such as Ludwig Feuerbach and more recently Don Cupitt. Hume, for example, writes in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*:

> "The Deity, I can readily allow, possesses many powers and attributes of which we can have no comprehension; but, if our ideas, so far as they go, be not just and adequate, and correspondent to his real nature, I know not what there is in this subject worth insisting on. Is the name, without any meaning, of such mighty importance? Or how do you mystics, who maintain the absolute incomprehensibility of the Deity, differ from sceptics or atheists, who assert, that the first cause of all is unknown and unintelligible?"[211]

Again, Feuerbach declares forcefully:

> "But a being which has no predicates or qualities cannot possibly affect me, and what has no effect upon me, does not exist for me. Where man denies God all qualities- God himself is denied. A being without qualities is one which cannot become an object to the mind, cannot be conceived of as existing. Where man deprives God of all his qualities, God is no longer anything more to man than a negative being... But this distinction between what God is in himself and what he is for me is an unfounded and untenable distinction. I cannot possibly know whether God is something else in himself or for himself than what he is for me. What he is to me is, to me, all that he is."[212]

Developing this Humean and Feuerbachian line of criticism, Cupitt wrote almost three decades ago in his review of Hick's *God Has Many Names*:

> "Everything said of God is seen as highly variable, symbolic and culturally conditioned, then religious language ceases actually to describe God. It becomes cultural expression, not metaphysical description. God becomes an I-know-not-what, like substance in Locke's philosophy, on the point of vanishing altogether. Why not just take one more step and say that religion is wholly human and that religious practices and values must be chosen and followed for their own sakes, disinterestedly."[213]

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[208] Eddy, *"Religious Pluralism and the Divine,"* 477.
[209] Eddy, *"Religious Pluralism and the Divine,"* 477.
[210] Eddy, *"Religious Pluralism and the Divine,"* 477.
[211] Hume, D, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Aiken, H D, New York: Hafner Press, and London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1948, 31.
[212] Feuerbach, L, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. Eliot, G, New York: Frederick Ungar Pub., 1964, 12-13.
[213] Cupitt, D, *"Thin-line Theism," The Times Literary Supplement*, 8 August 1980, 902.

These are crucially important charges which may eventually shatter Hick's noumenal Real. But Hick is adamant in his response to Eddy, maintaining that these are not unique criticisms specifically levelled against a pluralist understanding of religion. "For the naturalistic option can be invoked against non-pluralist as easily as against pluralist religious views."[214] Thus Hick claims that the argument cannot be used against a pluralist by an exclusivist. Hick's point is certainly true and seemingly fair. However, one can easily recognise that it only diverts the attention rather than answering the question. There is a significant difference between an exclusivist and a pluralist in their understanding of ineffability. An Exclusivist is less likely to resort to strong ineffability than a pluralist. What Hick's theory does is to widen the traditional space that used to exist between God as He is in himself and as understood and experienced by us by supporting a strong ineffability thesis, which weakens both his theory as a religious interpretation of religion and the notion of Real.

Thus Hick's notion of Real did not even satisfy his fellow pluralists, as P Byrne argues when he affirms that Hick's distinction between the Real as in itself and as humanly apprehended and experienced "leaves too little in the way of human cognitive responses in the religion to be caused by the transcendent, and too much to be caused by human social and historical factors,"[215] which makes it almost impossible to "posit cognitive contact with religious reality." Within this open space of cultural, social and historical concepts, in the end, we come to realise that "we could have those beliefs, those experiences, regardless of how the transcendent in itself acts or of whether it exists at all."[216] In short, Byrne thinks that Hick's ineffable noumenal Real fails because "culture and religious tradition play too great a causal role" to the degree that they engender the entire role of the Real "in generating the means of referring to sacred."[217] This in turn renders the noumenal Real *redundant*.

Byrne is not the only scholar to question the necessity of the noumenal Real in Hick's hypothesis and to judge it to be otiose. Eddy, for example, avows in concluding his evaluation of Hick's hypothesis that the Real *an sich* is a "purely unnecessary and unjustifiable construct. While it *may* exist, like almost anything in the realm of the 'conceivably possible,' there is certainly no reason to think that it *does*."[218] To add to this list: Loughlin describes the notion as "ontologically unnecessary,"[219] a claim which is

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[214] Hick, *"Religious Pluralism and the Divine,"* 419.
[215] Byrne, P, *Prolegomena*, 38-39.
[216] Byrne, P, *Prolegomena*, 38-39.
[217] Byrne, P, *Prolegomena*, 38-39. K Ward also airs the same concerns in *"Divine Ineffability,"* 215.
[218] Eddy, *"Religious Pluralism and the Divine,"* 478.
[219] Loughlin, *"Prefacing Pluralism,"* 43.

also backed by D'Costa[220] and S Grover.[221] Finally, Rose speculates that "like Locke's matter and Kant's noumena" the notion is an "arbitrary construction" and therefore "useless."[222] Instead of clarifying Hick's position, it brings the pluralistic hypothesis to a "dead-end as a defence of religious cognitivity" and eventually debases Hick's efforts to "the noncognitivist, nonreligious, and functionalist interpretations of religion that the pluralistic hypothesis is designed to counteract."[223]

If the ineffable noumenal Real is so problematic, what could the solution be, if any? One thing is certain: "strong ineffability" of the Real is untenable. Thus the critics almost unanimously suggest that Hick should drop it. Opinions differ, however, when the question arises: what should its replacement be?

It is an irony that Hick on the one hand has been accused by G Loughlin of placing God "on the periphery with the deities of the other religions" and creating an "'empty space,'" and an "absent 'presence'" not to be filled by any conceptuality or account, neither the Nirvana of Buddhism, nor the God of Christianity" which puts "the question of religious truth in an acute form."[224] On the other hand, to bail Hick out of the problems of the noumenal Real, Smart proposes that it be replaced with the Buddhist notion of "Emptiness" as the "Foci of religion" which "bypasses concepts both of Reality and of Process."[225]

Eddy maintains that the whole project of pluralism is a total failure because to remedy the situation Hick has to "reinvest the noumenal Real with the ability to deliver a decisive -and identifiable- amount of raw experiential content, above and beyond any human-based contributions."[226] According to Eddy, because of the unbridgeable gap between the two notions of the Real (in itself and as humanly experienced) in Hick's hypothesis, the Kantian model cannot deliver what he requires.[227] Therefore, unless Hick drops the noumenal/phenomenal Kantian distinction his hypothesis fails.

Verkamp, however, proposes an analogical-God-talk solution. He believes that the Real in Hick's pluralism could be given a "more determinate content" to "bring it into closer correspondence with its phenomenal manifestations."[228] To be able to do that, Hick

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[220] D'Costa, G, *"John Hick and Religious Pluralism: Yet Another Revolution,"* in *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion: Critical Studies of the Work of John Hick*, ed. Hewitt, H, London: Macmillan, 1991, 7-9. D'Costa describes the Real as redundant and Hick's position as "transcendental agnosticism." In the same volume B Hebblethwaite shares D'Costa's redundancy charge by summarising the Real as "so vague as to be entirely redundant" (Hebblethwaite, B, *"John Hick and the Question of Truth in Religion,"* 130).

[221] Grover, S, *"Unmatching Mysteries,"* review of *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, by John Hick, Times Literary Supplement, no. 22-28 December, 1989, 1404. Grover alleges that in the pluralistic hypothesis "the nebulous notion of the Real seems to be doing no work."

[222] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 113.

[223] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 112.

[224] Loughlin, G, *"Noumenon and Phenomena,"* Religious Studies 23, 1987, 504-505.

[225] Smart, N, *"A Contemplation of Absolutes,"* in God, Truth and Reality: Essays in Honour of John Hick, ed. Sharma, A, New York: St Martin's Press: 1993, 180.

[226] Eddy, *"Religious Pluralism and the Divine,"* 478.

[227] Eddy, *"Religious Pluralism and the Divine,"* 478.

[228] Verkamp, *"Hick's Interpretation of Religious Pluralism,"* 112.

does not even have to sacrifice "its noumenal character and the symbolic, mythical nature of all talk about it."[229] Here Verkamp moves towards a solution which highlights once more the need for a "genuine analogical talk" in Hick's hypothesis which does not "preclude the recognition of mystery"[230] and recognises the possibility of a harmonious "analogical relationship between man and God" on the lines of "'similarity within an ever-increasing dissimilarity.'"[231] However, I cannot see how Hick could manage to provide such a solution unless he assigned a new role to the word "noumenon." It seems to me that it is difficult to put *analogical talking* and *noumenon* together since, for Hick, noumenon suggests the total otherness and ineffability of the Real, which is the reason why he opted for the Kantian epistemology in the first place. To me, therefore, this looks like an unworkable suggestion, though I would be interested to see how Verkamp might develop it in more detail.

Last, but not least, I would like to present two pluralist solutions which are quite close to each other and argue for the same cause: a "convergent pluralism."[232] First Byrne's version of it:

> "The proper way to cope with these categorical differences is to see them as pointing to some faltering *insight* into the character of the sacred, and not to its absolute unknowability as implied by Hick. In short, we must see such differences as pointing to the true conclusion that the transcendent has both personal and impersonal aspects to its nature."[233]

Here is Ward's version:

> "The pluralistic hypothesis now becomes the view that virtually all serious religious traditions will contain matrices of myth which implicitly contain a disclosure of a reality of compassion and bliss which calls human beings to union with itself... it may be termed 'convergent pluralism'... there is a spiritual reality of supreme power and value; but we are unlikely to have a very adequate conception of it. However, there are many ways in which it may be disclosed to human beings; and all of them are likely to exhibit defects of human conception and limitation of vision. In particular, the claims of any tradition to have an exclusively true grasp of it must be denied... there are genuine experiences of the Real, however difficult it is for us to distinguish the real from the illusory; and thus that the Real is truly expressed in the phenomenal, even if its nature far transcends what we can grasp. We can still truly say that it is one, perfect, the cause of all."[234]

Before we proceed to evaluate the above suggestions, one point should be noted to clear up any misunderstanding. Even though it has been vaguely hinted at, we need to remind ourselves that two distinct understandings of ineffability have been appealed to in the preceding discussions. One is what Rose calls a "modest" ineffability which is common to almost all the great world religions of concern to Hick: Judaism, Christianity,

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229 Verkamp, *"Hick's Interpretation of Religious Pluralism,"* 112.
230 Verkamp, *"Hick's Interpretation of Religious Pluralism,"* 112.
231 Verkamp, *"Hick's Interpretation of Religious Pluralism,"* 112.
232 Ward, K, *"Divine Ineffability,"* 218.
233 Byrne, P, *Prolegomena*, 154.
234 Ward, K, *"Divine Ineffability,"* 218-219.

Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. According to this understanding, although we do not and cannot know the essence of the Real, our language still relates to it in an imperfect way; i.e. we know that it possesses goodness but that is different from our goodness. This is what Hick starts with to establish his point. He moves on, however, where others halt, to claim a complete discontinuity between the Real as it is and as we experience and understand it, which brings us the second type: that is "strong ineffability" which Hick favours and champions.

Both understandings of ineffability agree that *the real essence* of the Ultimate is beyond the grasp of human capability and of language. The problem arises when the relevance of religious language is brought into discussion with regard to the Real. Where moderate ineffabilists such as Aquinas, Maimonides and (as presented above) Ward et al hold that it does reveal some aspects of or have some purchase on the Real, strong ineffabilists like Hick maintain that it cannot be applied to the Real *an sich* at all.

Hick opposes the moderate way on the grounds that firstly, it is not "comprehensive" enough to include all varieties of religious experience (i.e. "non-theistic as well as theistic"). Secondly, human conceptions, such as "value, love and compassion," will lead us to ascribe "mutually contradictory attributes" to the Real such as being "personal" and "non-personal."[235] One wonders what makes Hick so sure that it is a contradiction to suppose that the Real can be expressed in different ways, e.g. personal and non-personal. In other words, if the Real is utterly unknowable, then we cannot know whether or not contradiction applies to it. It is a weakness in Hick's theory to suppose so. Certainly not all points of difference lead to contradiction; they can be incommensurable, but not contradictory. I suppose this is the case with the different experiences of the Real. Hick might object to this suggestion for I, too, do not have access to the knowledge of the Real to support my claim of the authenticity of incommensurable experiences of the Real. I take the point, but still hold that the Real can be experienced in different ways without contradiction for two reasons. Firstly, I endorse moderate ineffability as opposed to Hick's strong ineffability, whereby I can appeal to religious language. Secondly, Hick and I also agree on the veridicality of one's experience. Thus in searching for the simplest hypothesis, my contention is primarily based on the observable data and not on knowledge of the Real; this supports my conclusion and not Hick's: that to suppose to experience the Real both as personal and impersonal can be incommensurable but not contradictory.

It is my understanding that Hick seems to be mistaken about the necessity of moving from conflicting veridical experiences of the Real to the postulation of a totally ineffable noumenal Real. To me, it is hard to follow Hick's logical steps to be able to account adequately for the data: that there are conflicting authentic experiences of the Real and that therefore we must postulate ineffable noumenal Real corresponding to the data. Hence the critics are right in pointing out that the gap between the noumenal and the

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[235] *ROF*, 64.

phenomenal Real is too big to be overcome. Thus Hick pays a high price to secure the authenticity of the religious experience of humanity which equates to "transcendental agnosticism."[236] Rather if one seeks to achieve *the simplest hypothesis* to account for the data, it can be produced, as Byrne and Ward suggest, by positing that there is a transcendent Reality with certain properties like "supreme power and value" as "the cause of all" and can apparently be experienced in different ways[237] such as personal and impersonal. This is what the data suggests, as I see it, contrary to what Hick proposes.

In conclusion, although I am in sympathy with the criticisms directed at Hick's hypothesis by Eddy, D'Costa, Verkamp and Rose et al, I disagree with their solutions or final comments about the fate of pluralism. Starting from the veridicality of our experience, which to me includes religious language, I want to suggest that the Real can be experienced and expressed in different ways, e.g. personal and impersonal. Thus if Hick wishes to rescue the situation, he should drop the notion of "strong ineffability" of the Real and adopt instead, as suggested by Byrne and Ward, a "moderate ineffability." I believe this is essential, if pluralism is to survive the day. Consequently, in the next chapter, I will substitute strong ineffability of the noumenal Real with moderate ineffability. This will constitute one the major modifications I shall introduce into Hick's pluralism; because of the vital importance of moderate ineffability to the whole hypothesis, I shall call my modified version *moderate pluralism*.

Nevertheless, this conclusion gives rise to another question: which ways of experiencing the Real constitute the appropriate ways? Even though Hick concentrates on personal and impersonal experiences of the Real, he does acknowledge that there are other ways of experiencing the Real. He dismisses "Satanism"[238] as an inappropriate response to the Real, while giving credit to "Marxism" and "humanism" as possible imperfect responses. So what are Hick's criteria in assessing religions? If he has any, what problems are associated with them? This is what I turn to in the following section.

4.5. The Criterion: Salvation/liberation[239] as Human Transformation

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[236] D'Costa, *"John Hick and Religious Pluralism,"* 7. In a recent article, Hick replies D'Costa's charge: "But it is a mistake to equate the concept of ineffability with agnosticism. Agnosticism in this context is the view that the Ultimate is either personal or non-personal but we do not know which. That the Ultimate is ineffable means that it is beyond the scope of our human conceptual systems, including the personal/impersonal dichotomy" (Hick, *"The Possibility,"* 163, fn. 4). But, eventually, Hick's defence comes down to the same conclusion, i.e. putting the Ultimate beyond the scope of human concepts implies agnosticism. The previous quotations from Hume and other sceptics exposes this more clearly.

[237] Ward, K, *"Divine Ineffability,"* 218-219.

[238] *ROF*, 79.

[239] W C Smith exposes the inappropriateness of this when he writes that:

> "The traditional Christian term 'salvation' is certainly not generic; and while some Christians will continue to use it ..., others internally have come to find it problematic; not to say, especially among youth in the West, vacuous. The concept behind the word, and to some degree the reality behind the concept, have been lost; part of what was traditionally signified must be recaptured, a new word to express it probably being requisite. 'Liberation' has caught the fancy of some, with but little of its traditional Hindu connotation; and *shalom* is beginning to move beyond Jewish borders. 'Identity' is currently having surprising vogue; some of us find it less rich and compelling that others seem to do" (Smith, W C, *Towards a*

Human transformation as "salvation/liberation" constitutes one of the three corner-stones of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, the other two being the postulated Real as the ground of religious experience and trusting one's experience, including religious experience. Hick thinks religions are "appropriate responses" to the Real depending on their fruits: "how effectively they promote" "salvific transformation" within the framework of "seeking the good of others as much as of oneself."[240] N Smart describes this as a "pretty squashy criterion,"[241] which apparently Hick likes, since he is after a "soft"[242] criterion, a criterion which deals with that which cannot be precisely measured.

Hick's criterion does not come cheap, as Byrne observes. It has two severe effects on religions: firstly, it de-emphasises the importance of their doctrines and theories and secondly, it renders 'unimportant' the methods they employ to achieve salvation/liberation[243].

One of the most serious charges brought against Hick's criterion is that it reduces the contents of religions almost to nothing but a bundle of ethical principles. For him, since we will never be able to resolve conflicting truth-claims conclusively in this world, we should focus on how we could transform ourselves from self-centredness to Reality-centredness. Indeed Hick is not ashamed of saying that everything in a religion is a relative means towards this transformation, we should not be distracted by trivial issues, and should concentrate on being better human beings. He writes:

> "The basic thought is that religious teachings are not absolute and eternal truths but are human ideas that can help people to move at particular stages of their spiritual growth towards the goal of enlightenment, liberation, awakening or, in Christian terms salvation... And the entire corpus of ideas, pictures, stories, doctrines, spiritual practices, social ethos and forms of life constituting a religious totality is only valuable as a means to an end -the end that we variously know as salvation... awakening. If each of the world religions could come to see both itself and the others in this way, they would allow people to grow within their own different faith-traditions, and would also be able to share spiritual resources across traditional borders."[244]

He furthermore engages with Buddha's "skilful means" and expresses his liberal approach to religious means in a fashion which sounds more like a radical Sufi: "Likewise, the Buddha said, the *Dharma* (or in Christian terms, the gospel) is 'for

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World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion, London: Macmillan: 1981, 182).

240 *ROF*, 76.

241 Smart, N, *"A Contemplation of Absolutes,"* 181.

242 *ROF*, 77.

243 Byrne, *Prolegomena*, 92-93.

244 *ROF*, 115-116. He also cites (115) Wittgenstein as one of his main inspirations: "My propositions are elucidatory in this sense: he who understands me finally recognises them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)" (Wittgenstein, L, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. Ogden, C K, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, 189, ¶ 6.54).

carrying over, not for retaining... You, monks, by understanding the Parable of the Raft, should get rid even of (right) mental objects, all the more of wrong ones."[245]

Hick's attitude to the living tissue of religions vis-à-vis salvation has two implications. Firstly, contrary to his initial intentions of producing a better and more comprehensive hypothesis, he commits the mistake of naturalistic explanations: reductionism. Hence, giving it a bit of a religio-ethical twist via the postulated Real did not rescue his theory from being described by S M Heim as a "friendly reductionism, which sees a true *religious* meaning of the faiths obscured by metaphorical language."[246] Heim also criticises Hick for trying to present the ethical dimension of religions not as the "best test for the realisation of a religious end," but "as the index of the achievement of only one religious end" by using the "word 'salvation' in a univocal sense."[247] In this way, despite the incommensurability of different forms of being human (e.g. religious and humanist) Hick grants even to humanists, Marxists, etc. a religious share under his umbrella of salvation/liberation by claiming that they, too, are responding to the Real, making them in Heim's terms "anonymous religionists."[248] Hick is aware of this inclusivist tendency in his theory and is happy with it.[249] One could argue, however, that this may work against him. If Marxism can save us, why do we need religion at all? Hick has two answers to this question: One is that there are different inclusivisms and inclusivism in one area does not necessitate it in another. "Each issue has to be considered on its own merits."[250] This leads us to his second answer, which he gave at a conference: at the salvational level, Marxists and humanists are responding to the Real, but at the ontological level their system is wrong in denying the existence of a transcendent being.[251]

The second problem with Hick's pragmatic criterion, Rose holds, is that in the final analysis he converts to a "crypto-perennialism." When Hick deserts the doctrinal and theological contents of religions in favour of "soteriological efficacy," he seems to be moving, Rose argues, towards a "new form of perennialism."[252] The pragmatic criterion makes the pluralistic hypothesis "as vacuous and ahistorical a reductionism as perennialism"[253] since it commits "the error of the perennialists by slighting the concrete differences of the religions in favour of a criterion thought generally applicable to all *true* religions."[254] Hick's theory falls apart, according to Rose, because his "thin ethical

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[245] *ROF*, 115.
[246] .Heim, S M, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbiss Books, 1995, 30.
[247] Heim, *Salvations*, 27. Byrne also points out the same problem in *Prolegomena*, 92-93.
[248] Heim, *Salvations*, 30-31.
[249] *ROF*, 81.
[250] *ROF*, 81.
[251] Hick, J, *"Is Christianity the Only True Religion?,"* Birmingham: Birmingham University, November 1997, privately recorded audio material.
[252] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 115-116.
[253] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 116.
[254] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 116.

assertion" as the true aim of religions' transforming power "can be interpreted in nonreligious terms as the guiding principle of a nonreligious system of ethics."[255]

Rose's charge of implicit perennialist tendencies in the pluralistic hypothesis is certainly fair, yet I disagree with his conclusion. That the whole phenomenon of religious experience can be explained in nonreligious terms does not weaken Hick's hypothesis, since Hick already upholds the religious ambiguity of the universe; that is to say, it could be interpreted both religiously and nonreligiously. To me, Hick's way of explaining the situation religiously makes better sense than explaining it nonreligiously, due to the fact that it provides a more satisfactory account of the centuries-long religiosity of people.

But if the Real is utterly unknowable, how does he know for sure that actions like "love, bliss, compassion, etc." are the right responses to the Real? Hick, agreeing with Wainwright, admits that his argument is circular in the sense that "the criterion is authentic because the traditions that teach it are authentic. The only test for their authenticity, though, is that they meet our criterion."[256] Hick, however, defends his position on the grounds that this kind of circularity cannot be avoided in comprehensive theories. If one believes in a naturalistic explanation of religion, one naturally uses "naturalistic assumptions to support it." The same goes for any other explanation, whether religious, such as in Christianity or Islam, or "sense perception." All appeal to internal criteria valid within those systems. Thus Hick, as someone "speaking from within the circle of religious faith, not professing to establish the validity of that faith," concludes that "there are no non-circular ways of establishing fundamental positions."[257]

Wainwright replies by insisting that Hick's position does provide a convincing answer. It is true, he agrees, that the justifications of religious and sense experiences are "indeed ultimately circular" in the sense that Christian "criteria are justified by Christian views about God," as are perceptual criteria by "views about the nature of physical objects and our perceptual apparatus."[258] At this stage, however, Hick faces a dilemma. If the Real is totally ineffable, there is no way of justifying "the *pluralist's* criterion (viz., love/compassion)."[259] This leads us back to our point about the need to revise the strong ineffability of the noumenal Real. That is, to be able to justify his theory Hick has to subscribe to a moderate version of ineffability in line with Ward and others' stance and agree that certain aspects of our language do apply to the Real, such as goodness, compassion, etc.

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[255] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 117.
[256] Wainwright, *"Review of The Rainbow of Faiths,"* 126; the same charge has been brought against Hick by T R Stinnett. See his *"John Hick's Pluralistic Theory of Religion,"* The Journal of Religion 70, no. 4, 1990, 586.
[257] *ROF*, 78-79.
[258] Wainwright, *"Review of The Rainbow of Faiths,"* 126.
[259] Wainwright, *"Review of The Rainbow of Faiths,"* 126.

Rose detects a contradiction between (i) the pragmatic criterion of salvation/liberation as human transformation, which, he avers, is an appeal to "practical reason" and (ii) the postulation of the Real as an appeal to "theoretical reason."[260]

It seems to me that Rose is mistaken in two ways in his understanding of Hick's pragmatic criterion. Firstly, Hick does not associate his pragmatic criterion with Kant's practical reason. At first sight he may appear to be so, but my reading of Hick does not support Rose's claim. On several occasions, Hick clearly states that he is using just one aspect of Kantian philosophy in the epistemology of religion, a use which he concedes Kant himself might have objected to.[261] So Hick's appeal to theoretical reason does not necessarily entail his subsequent appeal to practical reason in establishing the criterion of salvation/liberation. Rose's other mistake lies in thinking that Hick turns to practical reason after his failure in locating a tenable noumenal Real. For me, practical and theoretical reason support each other, and the relation between them works in the opposite direction that Rose argues for. That is to say, Hick wishes to postulate the noumenal Real after he observes the fruits of religion in each of the great world religions. This leads him to the conclusion that there must be an ultimate being as the cause of all these. In other words, the pragmatic criterion is not an escape from failure; it is rather a step leading to the postulation of the Real.

To ascribe the goodness of the action of a human being to his religiosity seems to me rather a weak principle, since it is immensely difficult to analyse exactly what the real motive is behind a person's action. There could be several explanations for a person's good action, from obedience to law to hedonism or nihilism. Religion could certainly be one of these, but this does not necessarily suggest that it is *the* only motive. Hick accepts in several places that morality does not have to be based on religion. Thus although there could be a relationship between religion and ethical soundness, there cannot be a direct relation applicable in all instances. Additionally, one should remember the fact that the good results do not always guarantee the truthfulness of the tradition that one follows, just as bad examples do not prove the falsehood of a tradition. Hence Rebecca Pentz, arguing along the same lines, urges Hick to "establish a positive correlation to the same degree between being transformed to Reality-centredness and exhibiting the fruits of saintliness." She reckons that Hick has not done this and "it cannot easily be done."[262]

Even if one establishes that religion is the main cause of the good actions of people, how can one be sure that all these actions have been caused by only one ultimate reality? Religions might be soteriologically efficient and "point toward separate Realities." Pentz scrutinises Hick's position and accuses him of leaning on assumptions instead of offering

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[260] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 114. If this claim is sustainable then the same may apply to Kant, since he, too, believes that although we cannot know God by theoretical reason, we do need a postulated God to be able to behave morally.

[261] See for example *ROF*, 46.

[262] Pentz, R, *"Hick and Saints: Is Saint-production a Valid Test?,"* Faith and Philosophy 8, no. 1, 1991, 101.

necessary evidential data to support his conclusion that the soteriological criterion points toward the same Reality. She cites Cobb, who suggests (in the light of the empirical data that Hick uses) that religions do in fact point towards separate realities.[263] But Pentz's point is not totally justifiable. As indicated previously in the discussion of the Real *an sich*, Hick does not necessarily believes that there is one Real and all salvation/liberation is directed towards it. He rather leaves open the logical possibility that there could be more than one Real (even though the notion of plurality does not apply to Hick's Real), but for the sake of simplicity he opts for one.

As I said earlier when presenting Hick's hypothesis, despite its claim of plurality, universality and comprehensiveness, Hick's salvation/liberational doctrine seems to me still narrow in its treatment of archaic/primitive religions[264] and new religious movements. Despite Hick's resistance to accepting a fixed definition of religion and eagerness to replace a formal definition with the Wittgensteinian "family resemblance" theory, he seems to be operating with a fixed understanding of religion. In other words, he has certain assumptions about what a religion is and the importance of different aspects of it, e.g. moral, social, ritual and so on. Heim rightly exposes this point when he argues that Hick's understanding of "religion" is restricted to a "'post-axial' tradition" in which "salvation" is its "main concern." It is also Hick's assumption that, according to Heim, the nature of salvation "taking place in each tradition" is the same and "no other sort is possible."[265] I believe that while Hick emphasises rightly the moral and social fruits of religions, he overlooks the importance of other aspects, especially rituals, and their contribution to the salvific/liberational process. I will look at this issue in more detail in the next chapter while revising Hick's thesis.

I contend that many of the living archaic religions, or pre-axial traditions in Hick's terms, and probably some of the new religious movements, would feel unjustly treated under the shadow of the established great religions. Considering the important role of the pre-axial religions in keeping the social and ecological order stable on the one hand and Hick's coined term of *political saintliness* on the other, there arises a problem of contradiction in determining the aim of religion. The problem as I see it is this: Hick identifies accurately "ego transformation" in the great religions as their main aim. Thus he values unselfishness and wishes human beings to become integrated in society by putting the benefit of the majority before their selfish needs. In a way, he argues that religions aim for a harmonious society in which every group of human beings live happily ever after. But he does not value an already ego-transformed primitive society living harmoniously both with nature and with each other. That is, Hick does not consider them as transformed, even though just like his political saints, individuals in primitive societies put the order of society and nature always before their own gain. I am not here

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[263] Pentz, *"Hick and Saints,"* 98.
[264] I use *archaic*, *primitive* and *pre-axial* synonymously to refer to the pre-axial religions.
[265] Heim, S M, *Salvations*, 26.

making a value judgement on either type of living, only arguing for a better understanding and treatment of primitive religions in Hick's pluralist salvific/liberating project, if it is to suffice as a truly pluralistic religious interpretation of the religious experience of humanity. As it stands, Hick's theory does not do justice to other, less common ways of living according to salvific/liberating schemes, and reflects a Western understanding of life, society and religion. This seems to me to point to a narrow-mindedness in evaluating the whole of religious experience.

It appears, then, that Hick has not carefully thought through his understanding of primal religions in relation to salvation. When I met him in Birmingham in November 1997, he seemed to imply on one occasion that the followers of primal religion have a better way of living and therefore do not actually need the type of transformation required by the followers of post-axial religions. This is because, Hick believes, the question of ego-centredness does not exist among primal societies.[266] However, when I put to him the question of whether some forms of living are better than others, he denied this and said that there are just different ways of living/being. This brings me to the conclusion that Hick's focus on post-axial religions prevented him from producing a better understanding of primal religions. In fact, some speculate that Hick is still "searching for some 'universal theory' or 'common source' of religion."[267] Nevertheless, I disagree with this assertion, for, in my opinion, Hick's soteriological criterion of "human transformation from self-centredness to Reality-centredness" is right in identifying the ultimate aim of the great world religions. But I believe its scope needs to be widened to embrace ritual and other aspects of religion and to recognise the salvific importance of primitive religions and new religious movements. I shall come back to this task in the next chapter.

4.6. Partial Conclusions

My aim in this chapter was to offer an extensive critique of the pluralistic hypothesis. I focused my attention on four points: theological arrogance, reductionism, the problems associated with the Real and the problem of criterion, respectively.

The charge of theological arrogance is frequently brought up against Hick's theory, since it claims to have the most comprehensive explanation of religious phenomena, despite the fact that nobody can have God's eye view of religions. Hick's answer is that he never claims to have God's eye view or any privileged position, but rather maintains that his theory is inductively reached. I believe this is partially true, since he initially relies on the observable fruits of religions manifested in the lives of particular individuals, namely saints. However, it is not purely inductive, since right from the

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[266] *AIR*, 29-30, 32. Hick quotes Robert N Bellah: "From the point of view of [the post axial, or in Bellah's terminology the historic, religions] a man is no longer defined chiefly in terms of what tribe or clan he comes from or what particular god he serves but rather as a being capable of salvation. That is to say that it is for the first time possible to conceive of man as such" (Bellah, R N, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World*, New York and London: Harper & Row, 1970, 33).

[267] Verkamp, *"Hick's Interpretation of Religious Pluralism,"* 114, 123n.

beginning it starts with certain epistemological premises about religion, religious experience, soteriology, saintliness, etc. (e.g. that religious experience is not in toto delusory and that all religions teach the Golden rule). Nevertheless, any theory, religious or non-religious, faces the same dilemma. That is to say, other theories about religion also begin with certain epistemological assumptions (though not always stated openly), choose their material accordingly and produce an interpretation, as illustrated in the case of naturalistic explanations in chapter two. In other words, there is no non-theory based way of producing an interpretation. Therefore it does not put pluralism in a worse position than any other theory.[268]

To me, the charges related to reductionism, particularly those relating to religious language, are more serious and cannot easily be fended off. Hick's theory not only projects a selective attitude towards the religious phenomena, but also contradicts the perceptions of the religions themselves. Thus this forms one of the points that I propose to modify in Hick's theory by developing a hermeneutical approach towards the holy texts.

The postulation of the totally ineffable Real poses one of the major difficulties in Hick's theory. I concentrated on three issues related to the Real. Firstly, transcendentality or causality of the Real, which is brought up by Rose. I argued that Rose's narrow understanding of transcendence put him in a position of accepting causality and refusing transcendentality. However, I believe that Hick's broader understanding of transcendence gives him enough manoeuvrability to be able to accept the causality of the Real, while holding onto its transcendence. My main concern with the Real lies in the second point: *ineffability*. Hick supports the strong ineffability of the Real, to which human concepts and language do not apply. This brings several problems with it: firstly, it makes the Real redundant (in that it does not serve any purpose and ultimately we can have religious experiences whether it exists or not). Secondly, the theory cannot successfully establish a link between religious experience and the Real. Thirdly, it reduces revelations to human products, which generates the fourth problem by creating a deadlock in interreligious dialogue. Thus, along the lines of Ward et. al., I propose the second modification in Hick's theory, that is the *moderate ineffability* of the noumenal Real. This will form a bridge between the noumenal and the phenomenal Real and make religious language more meaningful. Lastly, against Rose's assertion that the noumenal Real is redundant, I contend that the Kantian distinction is relevant, since, in essence, the Real is still unknowable and lies behind the human scope of understanding. The distinction will also

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[268] Ward's remark about Hick's position shed's important light on this issue:
"I do not think one can hold a religious view of some sort, however attenuated and revised it may be. Any such view presupposes the truth of some basic religious beliefs-such as that there is a suprasensory realm, having a certain character, which actively discloses itself to humans. In that respect, however, the account no more objectionable than that of theorists like Durkheim, who work from an equally strong presupposition that no such realm exists" (Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 108; see for more part V, sects. 7, 8).

help to boost religious tolerance among believers and non-believers alike by reminding them that nobody is capable of holding the absolute truth.

As the last point, I examined the criticisms related to Hick's criterion of "salvation/liberation" as human transformation. I argued that despite my principal agreement with it, I noticed that it was too narrow to accommodate different salvational/liberational stages found in world religions.[269] Thus I concluded that the scope of Hick's soteriological criterion has to be extended, which formed my third modification point in Hick's theory. In chapter five, I shall modify Hick's theory considering these points and discuss the implications of the modified religious pluralism for Islam.

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[269] Hick's understanding of salvation/liberation implies narrowing down religion to almost moral heroism, whereas if we look at religions from a wider perspective, religion covers a much broader area in addition to ethics. I suggest Smart's nine-dimensional examination of world religions illustrates this quite well. The dimensions are (1) "the ritual or practical," (2) "the doctrinal or philosophical," (3) "the mythic or narrative," (4) "the experiential or emotional," (5) "the ethical or legal," (6) "the organisational or social," (7) "the material or artistic," (8) "the political," and (9) "the economic (Smart, N, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs*, London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996, 10-11). See also his earlier work where he put forward a seven-dimensional hypothesis (minus the last two from the above list): *The World's Religions*, esp. 164-167 and 299-304 where he applies his hypothesis to primal religions, the Polynesian and African traditional religions respectively).

CHAPTER FIVE

5. MODERATE PLURALISM AND ISLAM

"You are cold, but you expect kindness.
What you do comes back in the same form.
God is compassionate, but if you plant barley,
don't expect to harvest wheat."
Rûmî[1]

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter I shall first present a modified version of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis in the light of the criticisms I considered in chapter four and then apply this modified version - which I refer to as *moderate pluralism*- to an Islamic milieu in order to highlight possible problems and offer solutions to them from an Islamic perspective.

Before presenting my modifications to Hick's hypothesis, to refresh our memories, I summarise certain points of pluralism which are crucial to the argument and where I deem no modification is necessary. I will keep them very brief, since they are discussed at length in the previous chapters. In my modification of Hick's theory, I focus my attention on three points in particular: i) against his reductionist mythical/metaphorical approach towards religious language, I call for a "hermeneutical approach," ii) against Hick's total ineffability of the noumenal Real, I argue for a "moderate ineffability," and iii) I believe the scope of his soteriological criterion needs to be widened by Dan Cohn-Sherbok's "viability principle." When I move to the Islamic context, I deal with five primary concerns. Firstly, I tackle the fundamental issue of how to reconcile the strict monotheistic faith of Islam in one God and the validity of the different religions argued by moderate pluralism? "The principle of plurality," as attested by the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions, leads to the solution here. Next I deal with the verses which carry an apparently exclusivist tendency, which brings us to the prophethood of Muhammad and the question of salvation. The third important point is the "freedom of religion" and law of apostasy as understood and applied to the Other (especially the people of the Book). Fourthly, I demonstrate the workability of a hermeneutical understanding of the Qur'an in the example of *kufr* (unbelief). Lastly, in this chapter, I consider the postmodern concerns from an Islamic perspective. To illustrate the point, I give one positive and one negative appreciation of postmodernism. The answer to postmodernism, I reason, lies not in a retreat to particularism in any form -inclusivism or exclusivism- but in developing a more positive, tolerant and pluralistic attitude, as proposed by moderate pluralism.

I will conclude first that, contrary to Hick's version, moderate pluralism is compatible with Islam. Secondly, as Islam has an intrinsic pluralistic character, moderate pluralism might facilitate Muslims to further this feature in their effort to form a better understanding of other religions. Finally, moderate pluralism can make positive

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[1] Rumi, *Unseen Rain*, 80.

contributions to the interreligious dialogue and world peace by fostering mutual-understanding, co-operation, respect and tolerance among different religious groups.

5.2. Religious Pluralism Revisited: Towards a Moderate Soteriological Pluralism

In what follows, I shall offer a brief summary of points in Hick's pluralism where, I think, no modification is necessary. I will enumerate five points: (i) "the right to believe," (ii) the effect of environment on us in our perception of the world (more specifically, the correlation between the accident of birth and choosing a religion), (iii) the evaluation of religions by their fruits (i.e. salvific effectiveness of great world religions), (iv) "salvation/liberation as human transformation" and (v) the Kantian distinction of noumenon and phenomenon.

Firstly, I think Hick has a good case in arguing that all experiencing is *experiencing-as*, as adopted from Wittgenstein's "seeing-as" principle. Thus, unless proven otherwise, one is justified in experiencing the world religiously just as one is in experiencing it naturalistically; in other words, as William James famously put it, one has a "right to believe." As far as the evidence is concerned, the principle of the religious ambiguity of the universe does not allow to us to falsify either religious or naturalistic explanations. Each is justifiable in its own right because they use different filters in their perception of the universe. This epistemology of religious experience also extends to the relations between religions. Just as one is justified in believing what one's experience reveals about the Real, so is everybody else who has a different experience of the Real than ours. This leaves us with the plurality of religions.

Secondly, I concur with Hick that since we are social animals, we perceive and respond to our environment through the culture-relative language-fed filters which involve an "active process of selecting, grouping, relating, extrapolating, and endowing with meaning by means of our human concepts."[2] That is to say, although we do not contribute much to the formation of the socio-cultural factors that shape our perception of the universe, neither are we passive receivers of information. This has three bearings on the plurality of religions. One is that it is natural that we have different religions because we have different filters through which to process information relating to the Transcendent. Secondly, we positively contribute to the plurality of religions because of our selective approach in assessing the information received. The third, Kantian inference, is that we must make a distinction between the noumenal Real, the Real *an sich*, and the phenomenal Real "as humanly perceived in different ways,"[3] though the gap is not so wide as Hick thinks it is. Hence I shall replace Hick's strong ineffability of the noumenal Real with moderate ineffability.

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[2] *ROF*, 29.
[3] *ROF*, 29.

When we approach the great world religions, therefore we observe that the great majority of human beings make their religious choice[4] within the boundaries of an environment, in which geographical, familial and social circumstances play a major role. Thus a Christian, a Muslim or a Buddhist is such because they are born into a Christian, Muslim or Buddhist environment.[5] This means that to associate salvation with a particular religion does not do justice either to human beings or to a compassionate and all-loving Ultimate Being. As far as human beings are concerned, exclusivist and inclusivist approaches ignore the human conditioning by ascribing salvation to the means beyond the capability of human beings. For I believe that, up to a certain age, we can neither choose our environment nor have a hand in our upbringing, which play the most crucial role in one's choice of religion. As to a compassionate and all-loving Transcendent Being, one can easily understand that it can neither deprive the vast majority of human beings of salvation nor favour one way over the other for one reason or another, such as that a particular religion corresponds to the Transcendent's particular way of making itself known (e.g. a particular prophet or a specific time it was revealed in or the holy scripture it is based upon). Such a God, Hick thinks, can only be called "the Devil."[6]

Thirdly, on a more basic and practical level, I also hold that Hick is right in his conviction that great world religions are "vast complex religio-cultural totalities, each a bewildering mixture of varied goods and evils."[7] This means that there is no "objective" way of "calibrating their respective values,"[8] i.e. "it is not possible to establish the unique superiority of any one of the great world faiths."[9] To verify this, Hick urges us to focus on the "spiritual and moral fruits of these faiths"[10] and more specifically invites us to examine different followers from the great world religions. He maintains that despite the exclusivistic salvational claims of religions there is no real difference between followers of the great religions. Writing from a Christian perspective, he observes:

> "... It has become a fairly common discovery that our Muslim or Jewish or Hindu or Sikh or Buddhist fellow citizens are in general no less kindly, honest, thoughtful for others, no less truthful, honourable, loving and compassionate, than are in general our Christian fellow citizens. People of other faiths are not on average noticeably better human beings than Christians, but nor on the other hand are they on average noticeably worse human beings. We find that both the virtues and the vices are, so far as we can tell, more or less equally spread among the population [of] major faiths."[11]

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[4] One may ask what of those who do not make religious choices at all. The response of the pluralistic option is given in the first point. That 'the right to believe' can be exercised both ways, i.e. the right not to believe.
[5] *GHMN*, 44.
[6] *ROF*, 19.
[7] *ROF*, 14.
[8] *ROF*, 14.
[9] *ROF*, 15.
[10] *ROF*, 14.
[11] *ROF*, 13.

Hick's argument for the salvific effectiveness of the major world faiths appears to be on the right track, but from this equation I would like to drop the "major" component by which Hick excludes indirectly the "primitive" religions and the newer religious movements. I shall come to this later.

Fourthly, certainly, salvific effectiveness relates to a specific understanding of salvation/liberation. Despite my reservations about its scope, I regard Hick's definition of "salvation/liberation " as the "transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness"[12] a satisfactory starting point. This may sound too mystical or abstract, but I still believe that, as has been demonstrated in chapter three, it is justifiable to claim that our ultimate goal is to lose our ego and re-identify or in Hick's terms "re-centre" ourselves in the Ultimate Reality.[13] One should not be confused, however, by the proximity of "salvation" to Christian theology. Hick does not use the term with the common Christian meaning which necessitates the "atoning death of Jesus," etc. He only borrows the term and installs a different meaning to it. Indeed, in order to emphasise this different usage and to include impersonal experiences of the Real in this scheme, Hick always uses the term "salvation/liberation" rather than salvation.

Finally, as for the truth-claims of the religions, I hold with Hick that the Kantian distinction of the noumenal and phenomenal Real is viable and different religions are different ways of experiencing and expressing the noumenal Real, be they personal or impersonal. However, I believe that in order to avoid the total reductionism of Hick we have to establish a link between the noumenal and the phenomenal Real. Thus I call only for a partial ineffability of the noumenal Real and maintain that the religious language relates to the noumenal Real, but only at the very basic level, such as goodness, compassion, etc. This certainly runs against Hick's thesis of the "total ineffability" of the noumenal Real, which puts it "beyond the scope of our networks of human concepts."[14]

I shall now develop my modifications of the pluralistic hypothesis with respect to three points: (i) epistemological reductionism, (ii) the ineffability of the Real and (iii) the scope of the salvational/liberational criterion. Since epistemological reductionism and the ineffability of the Real are closely linked, I will discuss them together.

Arguing for a religious epistemology of pluralism, Hick avers that, theoretically speaking, one is justified in trusting what one's experience presents to one about the religious nature of things and, practically speaking, the majority of the believers from different religions are good human beings, i.e. salvifically transformed or liberated.[15]

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[12] *AIR*, 36; *ROF*, 18.

[13] In a recent interview, Hick's conclusion is also shared by Karen Armstrong in her saying that "religion at its best is about the loss of ego..." (34). See for more: Smoley, R, *"What is God? Interview with Karen Armstrong,"* Gnosis Magazine, Spring 1995, 28-34.

[14] *ROF*, 27.

[15] I may address one possible question here by referring to earlier discussions in previous chapters. One can possibly ask what about those who experience the universe non-religiously or experience the Ultimate as evil. Hick's answer for the first is that neither naturalistic nor religious account of the universe can be shown demonstrably to be true. The verification of either account can only take place in the hereafter. But from "the right to believe" we build our theory on the religious account,

When he is faced with the conflicting truth-claims of the religions, he appeals to the distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal Real. As a necessary consequence of this move, he believes that religious language only applies to the phenomenal level, since the noumenal Real is beyond the scope of human knowledge. That is to say, all religious language is symbolic and mythical.

However, as I indicated in chapter four, Hick's call for the strong ineffability of the noumenal Real and a mythical understanding of religious language creates many problems and undermines his hypothesis in the long run. Firstly, it renders the noumenal Real redundant, since if we cannot know anything of it, how we can know that it exists in the first place. Secondly, a postulated Real with formal qualities endangers his main task of accounting for religions cognitivity, for he cannot secure that the Real and religions are not entirely human constructions. Thirdly, it reduces Holy scriptures, thus revelation, to human productions. Fourthly, the reductionist attitude towards religious language puts off many devout religionists from pluralism and precludes its acceptance as a widespread reality. I will not go into detailed discussion of these points here for I did that in chapter four, but only address certain issues like revelation and other related questions.

The first problem to be resolved here is that of the Real, which has paramount importance as the ground for all religious experience. If pluralism cannot secure its place as a viable factor within the religious sphere, then the whole programme fails. Thus to solve this dilemma, I propose, as opposed to Hick's strong ineffability, a "moderate ineffability," which is common to all great world religions. According to this understanding, although we do not and cannot know the essence of the Real, our language still relates to it in an imperfect way; i.e. we know that it possesses goodness but that it is different from our goodness. With moderate ineffability, while maintaining that *the real essence* of the Ultimate is beyond the grasp of human capability and language, we still will be able to make good sense of both religious language and the necessity of the noumenal Real. Moderate ineffability holds that there is a transcendent Reality with certain properties like "supreme power and value" as "the cause of all" who can apparently be experienced in different ways[16] such as personal and impersonal. Thus the moderately ineffable noumenal Real becomes a necessity as the ground of all religious experience for a pluralist hypothesis, without which cognitivity of religions cannot be explained. Since it is known for all traditions, unlike Hick's strong ineffability, it can stimulate a positive atmosphere among religions towards a pluralist dialogue rather than creating a deadlock. I will not

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since we believe it to be true. For the second objection, experiencing God as evil, Hick holds that those who experience God as evil are mistaken, since their experience does not conform to the notion of the Real that the great world religions espouse. Hick argues for this on the phenomenal grounds -since we cannot know anything of the totally ineffable noumenal Real, not even good or bad- and is seriously criticised for it. I believe moderate ineffability offers a better solution here, for we can say that the Real is good and compassionate.

[16] Ward, K, *"Divine Ineffability,"* 218-219.

discuss Hick's objections to moderate ineffability here, since I replied to them in chapter four.

Another problem in Hick's picture is the concept of revelation, which is so crucial to Islam and many other traditions. It seems to me that there is no genuine contribution of the Real to religious language, i.e. revelation, which is reduced to human productions in Hick's hypothesis. He certainly claims that the Real has a contribution to the revelatory process, but very indirectly. In drawing attention to this point, Byrne accurately criticises Hick for giving "the human subject a heavy input into all cognition."[17] The same point has been made by Rose that Hick's hypothesis "grants too much power in the shaping of religions to the cultures within which they arise," and therefore fails to "respect the *activity* of the divine in the formation of religious traditions."[18] If we do not recognise the active role of the Real in the shaping of religious traditions in the form of revelations, then we will end up in Hick's negative position that "all are human creation," which helps neither pluralism nor induces any positive incitement among religions. I argue that, even though all are expressed in imperfect human languages within a historical period, the Real has a positive contribution in all of them, i.e. revelations are not entirely human products.

However, I am aware of that the stress on revelation poses more serious problems, such as an apparent relativity in divine willing. That is to say, the appeal to "revelation" effectively transfers issues of plurality (even incompatibility) from consideration of the conditions of human knowing to considerations of theology proper -viz. what God wills and does. This certainly engenders wider problems that go beyond the scope of this study at this stage. I will not attempt to answer them, but here are a few of them: why the Real wills more than one revelation, if any at all; whether one or all can be true at the same time; whether we are required to attempt to understand this diversity in any way or, since they are all the act of the Ultimate, just leave them as they are, and so on. Why do I appeal to revelation and where do I draw the line then as far as its place is concerned with moderate pluralism? My tentative understanding is that "revelations" are all caused by the Real, relate to it at the basic level (e.g. possessing goodness, being supreme power and value, etc.) but none can express it fully, because of the limitedness of our human languages. When it comes to the conflicting truth-claims that religions proffer, we have two means to deal with: firstly, since nobody has the absolute truth, all will be aware of the limitedness of their evidence. Secondly, I suggest we should follow a hermeneutical approach to understand and resolve these conflicts. I will come to this shortly. What if we do not have a moderate understanding of ineffability? We are then left with either total relativity or reductionism.

I argue that moderate ineffability offers a viable middle way between the total relativity of all religions, which is asserted by Rose, Heim and others, on the one hand; and Hick's reductionism, on the other. In a recent article, *Doctrine and Tolerance in Theology*

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[17] Byrne, P, *Prolegomena*, 122, 38-39.
[18] Rose, K, *"Doctrine and Tolerance in Theology of Religions: On Avoiding Exclusivist Hegemonism and Pluralist Reductionism,"* Scottish Journal of Religious Studies 17, no. 2, 1996, 114.

of Religions[19], Rose argues that in order to prevent religious intolerance, religious doctrines should be treated as "*revealed teachings*,[20] which is a line earlier proposed in his examination of Hick's pluralism, *Knowing the Real*.[21] Rose's case is almost identical to Nasr's thinking that religious doctrines are "divinely willed" and should be treated as such.[22] Rose develops an imaginary scenario in which six missionaries, "a Mormon bishop", "a fundamentalist Christian missionary," "a Hindu Vaisnava devotee," "an Advaita Vedantist monk," "a Buddhist monk," and "a Muslim *mullah*,"[23] are taken captive and imprisoned, but have to live together for the rest of their life, in a manner analogous to our communities. He concentrates on personal and impersonal experiences of the Real, and concludes that they all have to learn to live by the principle of "*subjective certainty* and *objective modesty*." That is to say that subjectively, everybody is certain about their apprehension of the truth, while maintaining the objective possibility that they may "all be wrong" or that "only one" of them may "finally be right."[24]

However, Rose's suggestion may lead to what D'Costa calls "transcendental agnosticism," since nobody is sure of the truth, despite their experiences and, in some cases, the supporting holy scriptures. Rose does not take into account the other side of the calculation either: the naturalistic explanation of religions, which claims that "none of their doctrines are true," which in effect is what Rose concludes. I cannot imagine a Muslim saying "I accept that Islam may not be true after all but still I keep on practising it, since I was brought up in it." This simply is like putting minus and plus together. Indeed, this is the sort of agnosticism that Hick refers to in response to D'Costa's charge of "transcendental agnosticism." Hick proclaims:

> "D'Costa describes my position as 'transcendental agnosticism'. But it is a mistake to equate the concept of ineffability with agnosticism. Agnosticism in this context is the view that the Ultimate is either personal or non-personal but we don't know which."[25]

In Hick's sense, I suppose Rose's position can be described as "agnostic," which results in scepticism among the followers of religions and undermines the religious doctrines he seeks to preserve. I wonder what makes Rose so sure that one's "subjective certainty" is nothing but an illusion, if one takes his principle of "objective modesty" seriously.

The commitment to doctrinal fidelity on the one side and religious tolerance on the other drives Rose to his rejection of Hick's Kantian distinction of noumenal and phenomenal Real. Despite his acceptance of the partial ineffability of the Real, he produces

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[19] Rose, K, "*Doctrine and Tolerance*," 109-121.
[20] Rose, "*Doctrine and Tolerance*," 109.
[21] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 140.
[22] Aslan, *Religious Pluralism*, 262. Aslan brought together Hick and Nasr (which was their first meeting) and conducted a joint interview at Birmingham University in October 1994 when Nasr was delivering the Cadbury Lectures. In the interview, Nasr defends, as a traditionalist, the authenticity of the Christian doctrines such as the Trinity and Incarnation as "divinely willed" against Hick's mythological/metaphorical understanding (261-262).
[23] Rose, "*Doctrine and Tolerance*," 115.
[24] Rose, "*Doctrine and Tolerance*," 119.
[25] Hick, J, "*The Possibility*," , 163, fn. 4.

a non-Kantian version of Hick's pluralism, because "it presupposes no noumenon/phenomenon distinction or dichotomy."[26] Even though he accepts a "fluid distinction between the degree of reality that a finite organism can apprehend and the whole of reality itself,"[27] he does not believe that there is a "formal dichotomy between human experience and that which transcends it." Because, Rose states, "we, as finite beings," cannot know "where a supposed line between the finite and the infinite should be drawn."[28] I take Rose's point that we finite beings cannot know where the exact line lies between us and the Real, neither does the moderate ineffability that I advocate claim to do so. However, I insist that without the "metaphysical hubris" of Kant's philosophy we should still keep the noumenon/phenomenon distinction within the framework of a pluralist philosophy of religions. What is the point of having the distinction? Firstly, even if we have moderate ineffability, the essence of the Real *an sich* still lies behind our human scope of understanding. Secondly, it will be a constant reminder to all that there are not only different ways of being human, e.g. religious and non-religious, but also different ways of experiencing the world religiously, e.g. personal and impersonal. Moreover, as a result of moderate ineffability, the distinction tells us that nobody's way is absolute, no tradition can grasp and represent the whole Real, despite the fact that the Real causes and contributes to all. For the distinction acts as a constant guard against absolutism, it may indeed endorse Rose's passionate support for the "truth" expected to emerge through "conversation" contributed to by every sect in a society, religious and otherwise.

However, let alone convincing and encouraging "conversation," Rose's argument for total relativity and scepticism will eventually backfire and discourage "conversation," without the crucial backing of moderate ineffability and its natural conclusion that "there is more than one true way of experiencing and expressing the Real." This is even more so, as we shall shortly demonstrate, for a pluralist Muslim who accepts other religions as equally salvific alongside Islam. This is a result of his/her faith in the Qur'anic message. Rose's suggestion of scepticism towards religious claims and Hick's proposal of reductionism (that Qur'an is human production and its language does not refer to God/Allah) will sound insulting to a Muslim instead of encouraging tolerance, respect and conversation. I conclude, then, that in order to do justice to the essential particularity of the religious traditions, and avoid Rose's scepticism and Hick's reductionism, a moderate pluralism should adopt the moderate ineffability of the Real. This will (i) secure its foundation as the basis for religious experience, prevent its redundancy, give more room and meaning for the Holy texts of the religions and encourage mutual as well as self understanding among religions.

In addition to the idea of moderate ineffability, as suggested above, in order to combat reductionism, I believe that moderate pluralism also has to adopt a more

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[26] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 132.
[27] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 133.
[28] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 133.

hermeneutical approach towards religious language. The room given to revelation by moderate ineffability should be assessed carefully under the light of hermeneutics. What I have in mind here is the modern hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur and others, which has been successfully applied to Islam by some Muslim scholars. Contrary to Rose's claims, I presume that religious doctrines, whether revealed or not, are open to reinterpretation. To illustrate this one can quote Rahner's "anonymous Christianity," which gained widespread support in Catholic circles, became almost the official doctrine of the Catholic Church and probably paved the way to more pluralistic approaches. I am not arguing whether it is the right approach to deal with other religions or the right interpretation of the texts. I am simply saying that it shows that, in addition to existing understanding of any text, new interpretations are always possible and in time might become the prevalent opinions among believers. In order to achieve this, I believe hermeneutics might be a better tool than Hick's mythical/metaphorical approach, which is totally reductionist when taken together with its co-supporter strong ineffability.

How different is the hermeneutical approach I argue for from Hick's mythical/metaphorical understanding? It differs from Hick's approach in three aspects. Firstly, it does not have the negative connotations that Hick's approach has, e.g. that holy texts are human products, which immediately puts off many devout believers even from considering pluralism a possible choice. One might ask: "Is this just a proposal to adopt a more friendly name then?" No, it is not. Hence the second aspect proposes a broader reading of the scriptures ("prophetic, legislative, narrative, sapiential and hymnal (poetic)"),[29] which includes Hick's mythical/metaphorical reading, too. Last but not least, it treats holy texts as revelations, not mythological human products which do not relate to the Real. I will not develop a hermeneutical religious pluralism, since this is not a hermeneutical examination of Hick's thesis. But in the following discussion of moderate pluralism from an Islamic point of view, I shall provide a hermeneutical framework by Arkoun and exemplify it by Esack. I will begin with a striking example of a narrow reading, or rather understanding of holy texts, by Rose as opposed to the wider reading that I urge, which will also form a bridge for the next topic. In explaining Hick's soteriological criterion (that a religious doctrine is authentic if it induces saintliness, i.e. directs one to the Real), Rose jumps hastily to exemplify the issue. According to the criterion, he contends that Hick can judge "a religious view that prescribes human or animal sacrifice is a worse viewpoint than one that proscribes such activities."[30] The immediate inference one can draw from Rose's illustration is that Islam is a worse viewpoint since it prescribes animal sacrifice than, let us suppose, Christianity which contains neither sacrifice. This certainly is an ill-fitting example and a narrow reading of the doctrine, not to mention the fact that it is insulting to and offensive Muslims. I described it as ill-fitting, because it is a mistake to put human and animal sacrifice together; while the former is

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[29] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 38.
[30] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 135.

almost unanimously proscribed by the great world religions, the latter is an agelong practice common to almost all of them. Furthermore, before making any judgement about its inductive soteriological value -and I believe it has that value and directs one towards the Real, one should consider the hermeneutical conditions surrounding animal or human sacrifice. In this regard it suffices to recall the narrative of Abraham's sacrificial event, commonly shared by Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions, and of Jesus' crucifixion on the cross. One can purport that even Hick's criterion of human transformation from "self-centredness to Reality-centredness" is tied up with the metaphor of sacrifice, that is sacrificing oneself for others and ultimately in the Real. Otherwise, I believe it will be too reductionistic to jump to the conclusion that religions commanding animal sacrifice are less efficient salvifically than those that do not. It will certainly help neither pluralism nor Rose's grand invitation for "conversation" for the sake of truth. Thus I conclude that a wider hermeneutical reading of the holy texts is vital to any pluralistic hypothesis, if it is to achieve comprehensiveness and viability in its account for religious diversity and to avoid reductionism.

As for Hick's salvation/liberation criterion, I hold that Hick's definition of "salvation/liberation" as the "transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness"[31] is an adequate ground. However, as indicated in chapter four, I have my reservations on three points: firstly, its scope is too narrow, both for the followers of the great world religions and for the religions themselves. Secondly, it is largely a secularised or desacralised evaluation of religions, a charge also frequently directed against the modernist Islamic scholars, such as Arkoun.[32] That is to say, it fails to address the importance of particular religious rituals, and de-emphasises the idea of the afterlife. Lastly, it also tends to equate religion with morality, i.e. it is reductionist.

Starting with the first of these charges, it seems to me that the scope of Hick's soteriological criterion is narrow from two aspects. For one thing, despite its claim of comprehensiveness, it does not fully take into account the primitive religions and the new religions and religious movements. Hick's position is not clear about the treatment of primitive religions. On the one hand, he thinks since the idea of the individual did not develop in these societies, we cannot apply the ego-transforming salvation/liberation criterion to these religions, viz. their function is different. As he puts it they are "communal rather than individual responses to the Real."[33] On the other hand, when I argued in my interview that since Hick's application of the Golden Rule ("it is good to benefit others and evil to harm them"[34]) is also applicable to these religions, their fruit might be as good or as abundant as the post-axial religions, he did not give a clear answer either. I believe that the

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[31] *AIR*, 36; *ROF*, 18.
[32] Khan, *"Epistemological Poverty,"* 76.
[33] *ROF*, 109.
[34] *AIR*, 299.

absence of self realisation[35] might not be as bad a factor in salvific transformation as Hick supposes. Thus, even though the function of the primitive religions might be different,[36] the spiritual fruits they bear, such as "generous goodwill, love, compassion,"[37] etc. upon the individuals might just as commonly be found in these religions, which indicates that they too might be authentic responses to the Real. What assurances do I have for the claim of similar spiritual fruits in the primitive religions? Firstly, communal life requires from one caring attitudes such as "generous goodwill, love, compassion." Secondly, I take these to be rooted in the character of every human being, which can flower and nourish in any environment, especially in primal societies where "personal relationships are so intense and so wide."[38] Thirdly, the central role of priests in Maya[39] and Aztec religions in the society and the stress on "moral, as well as ritual, purification before worship" in Aztec religion might provide us with clues to the occurrence of such moral fruits as compassion, love and caring towards others.[40] Therefore, I contend that, regardless of their functions, these religions should also be included among the religions which are salvifically/liberationally effective.

Hick is positive about the contribution of the new religious movements, such as Mormonism, Baha'i, Theosophy etc., to the salvific transformation of human beings, but doubts that these provide as good a path as the well established great religions. He believes that the same criterion of authenticity, which is "their observable moral and spiritual fruits in human life,"[41] is applicable to them also. At this stage, Dan Cohn-Sherbok's "criterion of viability," namely that "their capacity to satisfy the spiritual demands and animate the lives of adherents,"[42] might offer some help in our evaluation of both primitive religions

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[35] In fact, even this is not a claim which can be accepted without reservations. For instance, in some primal African societies "ego-centredness" has also been reported (Shorter, A, *"African Religions,"* in A New Handbook of Living Religions, ed. J R Hinnells, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, 570-571).

[36] In fact, it is difficult to substantiate such a sharp distinction between the functions of pre- and post-axial religions. Smart, for instance, mentions the commonality of salvation both in the ancient and classical worlds. He describes "salvation" as the idea that

> "human beings are in some kind of unfortunate condition and may achieve an ultimately good state either by their own efforts of through the intervention of some divine power. Very commonly, there is belief in a saviour God, that is, a God whose special concern is with the welfare of the human race. Examples of this idea are, in the ancient world, Isis, Mithra, and Christ; in the Far East, Amida Buddhain Japan and Kuan-yin in China; and Krsna and Rama in the Hindu tradition" (Smart, N, *"Soteriology,"* in The Encyclopedia of Religion, ed. M Eliade, London and New York: Macmillan, 1987, vol. 13, 418).

[37] *AIR*, 317.

[38] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 209. See also Ray, *"African Religions,"* 63, in which he points out that "from the point of view of African religions, a human being consists of social, moral, spiritual, and physical components united together." Even Hick accepts that primal religions promoted a stronger sense of community (AIR, 23, 29) than that of post-axial religions.

[39] Goring, R, ed., *Chambers Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions*, London: BCA, 1992, 331.

[40] Goring, *Chambers Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions*, 50-51. It should also be noted that many of the primal religions have religious leaders such as "prophets," "priests," "mediums and diviners," and "shamans" who act as guides for the society. See for example: Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, chp. 15; Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion*, chp. 9; Cooper, G, *"North American Traditional Religion,"* in The World's Religions, ed. S Sutherland, et al., London: Routledge, 1988, 876-877; Brotherston, *"Latin American Traditional Religion: Three Orders of Service,"* 894; Geertz, *"Native North American Religions,"* 537.

[41] *ROF*, 111, *AIR*, 307-308.

[42] Cohn-Sherbok, D, *"Ranking Religions," Religious Studies* 22, 1986, 382.

and the new religious movements. Cohn-Sherbok uses this criterion to asses the popularity of the modern Jewish movements, but I would like to quote another interesting example. Watt, both as a committed Christian and an eminent Islamist, observes in explaining the expansion of Islam in a "large area of the original heartlands of Christianity -Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Iraq and subsequently Asia Minor"[43] that:

> "[T]his result was due only to a slight extent to the political success of the Muslims, and much more to the fact that Islam could meet the spiritual needs of the peoples involved as well as, and perhaps even better than, Christianity could."[44]

However, in the spiritual realm there is no place for laziness and no community is indispensable. Therefore despite the praising verses that they "are the best community that has been raised up for mankind,"[45] which I think should not be taken literally,[46] Muslims are also warned that "if you turn away [from this teaching], He will substitute you for some other folk, and they will not be like you."[47] Even though one cannot demonstrate this, it is likely that probably because of this and other factors, we see new religious movements springing everyday here and there. Thus in addition to Hick's criterion of moral spiritual fruits, if we can see that they meet the criterion of "viability," we can say that they are

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[43] Watt, W M, *"The Nature of Muhammad's Prophethood,"* .The.Scottish.Journal.of.Religious Studies 8, no. 2, 1987, 82.
[44] Watt, *"The Nature of Muhammad's Prophethood,"* 82.
[45] *The Qur'an*, 3:110.
[46] The verse (3:110) reads: "You are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah..."
I suggested that the verse should not be taken "literally." My suggestion may sound unjustified in the first glance. But there are several reasons for this. Firstly, both classical and modern commentators unanimously agree that the verse does not imply the notion of a "chosen nation," as such found in Judaism (Ayoub, M M, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters: The House of 'Imran*, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992, vol II, 290-297). Such a notion would certainly contradict Islam's claim of being a "non-sectarian, non-racial" universal religion. Secondly, the meaning is conditional, that is Muslim community is not automatically designated as the best community just being Muslim; as Sayyid Qutb puts it, it is not "based on a religious or ethnic privilege" (Ayoub, *op. cit.*, 295). There are certain conditions to be met: "(1) Faith, (2) doing right, being an example to others to do the right, and having the power to see that the right prevails, (3) eschewing wrong, being an example to others to eschew wrong, and having the power to see that wrong and injustice are defeated" (*The Holy Qur'an*, 173, n. 434). Thus it is not the Muslim community that is best, but it depends on the social environment they provide through their work. As long as they fulfil these conditions, they can be a role "model for other communities and a leader in establishing a good and wholesome society" (Ayoub, *op. cit.*, 295), which can be seen in Islamic history (e.g. Moorish Empire in Spain). However, if they do not obey by those rules, they are reminded that they are not indispensable (*The Qur'an*, 47:38; cf. 9:38) and can be replaced by any other nation that would fulfil those duties. I suppose this, too, can be illustrated by several examples from Islamic history, especially the recent situation of Muslim world is a case in point. Finally, from a pluralistic perspective, I believe the verse should be understood in the wider context of the Qur'an (particularly 2:62 and 5:69, which will be examined in detail later). Hence salvation/liberation is not reserved to Muslims only. Rahman remarks that nobody, including Muslims, "will be automatically God's darling" by carrying certain labels; that is, "those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds -from any section of humankind- are saved" (Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 166-167 and Rahman, *"A Muslim Response,"* 74-75). Nor are Muslims qualified automatically for salvation/liberation, just because they are Muslims. In this respect Muhammad Abduh's remark on 2:62 are crucial: "God's approval or wrath" is not related to "one's religious identification or social status. What really counts is a heartfelt belief in God." (McAuliffe, *"Exegetical Identification of the Sabi'un,"* 100-101.). I suppose this suffices for the time being, since I shall deal with these issues in more detail in the forthcoming sections.
[47] *The Qur'an*, 47:38; cf. 9:38.

salvifically effective. However, Cohn-Sherbok warns us that "viability" cannot guarantee authenticity. Therefore, I suggest we should be cautious about generalisation of all movements, since, as I shall emphasise shortly, the content of a movement is of paramount importance in evaluating a religion or a religious movement.

The second aspect of narrowness in Hick's soteriological criterion concerns the actual followers of a religion. One gets the impression that it is mostly designed for the saints in the great world religions, who are naturally gifted and have achieved a great deal on the spiritual journey. However, the majority of followers rarely achieve this status. Hick is right in describing the ultimate goal of religions as "ego transformation," but fails to discuss the intermediate states which I described in two Muslim cases and among the primitive religions. One may not be a socially fruitful and productive follower of a religion; that is to say, one may not be putting as much effort in social activities as Hick's political saints, but might still achieve salvation/liberation spiritually by following the basic rules of one's religion. I shall develop this point further while discussing the other two problems of Hick's soteriological criterion in the following paragraphs.

Since the last two points, namely the restriction of religion to the earth/world and downgrading of religion to morality, are intertwined, I shall discuss them together. Hick's understanding of salvation/liberation sidelines the spiritual and the ritual aspects of religion. I shall cite here once more the examples of two Muslims presented in chapter four: Take the example of a morally good Muslim who strives for the betterment of his fellow human beings, but does not practice Islam in the strict sense of the word, viz. neither prays five times a day, nor fasts during Ramadhan, etc. Let us imagine another Muslim who is a devout practitioner, fasts, prays, etc., but, nevertheless, does not involve himself very much in activities which benefit society and humanity at large. It is obvious that according to Hick's criterion, the former is more likely to be saved and liberated than the latter, whereas, in fact, Islamically speaking, despite the fact that neither is an ideal Muslim, the judgement is the reverse of Hick's -I should perhaps note that here by "saved" I refer to the Islamic notion of *najat* or *falah*, that is to please Allah and be rewarded by Heaven. Examples could obviously be expanded to accommodate other traditions. Thus, it is not difficult to see that Hick's soteriological criterion is reductionist, though it may be appealing at first to the adherents of many traditions. As Ward puts it accurately, what Hick does is

> "to interpret soteriological efficacy solely as moral heroism or the achievement of spectacular virtue. The problem is that many clearly false ideologies can lead to morally heroic conduct on the part of believers, from Marxist-Leninism to Existentialist Humanism.[48] Moral efficacy may be one test of an acceptable belief; but it is not even a necessary condition of a belief's being true, much less a sufficient one."[49]

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[48] It is no coincidence that Hick's salvific scheme includes those as well.
[49] Ward, K, *Religion and Revelation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, 316.

Hick appears to be mistaken in assuming that the doctrinal or ritual aspect of religions are "secondary packaging" for they, too, direct one to the Real and bear observable moral and spiritual fruits upon the human beings. Religion encompasses morality but it is more than that. Thus a theory as broad as Hick's, instead of reducing religious epistemology to morality, should take a wider spectrum towards the salvific ends and efficacy of religion. Hence, on the basis of respecting religious doctrines and avoiding reductionism, it should declare that while losing one's ego and recentring oneself in the Real is the ultimate goal of religions, the basic formal and ritual structures of religions are also important steps preparing and leading one towards that goal. Reductionist and dismissive attitudes towards religious doctrines will not help Hick's theory, but damage it. I believe that, as Ward put it cogently, "the possession of some particular beliefs is necessary to salvation. People without those beliefs will not attain salvation, for the simple reason that salvation consists in attaining a state which entails possessing such beliefs."[50] Hick, indeed, should welcome the background different religions provide for their adherents, while stressing the need to achieve the ultimate goal. However, I should distance myself from S Mark Heim who advocates a "post-pluralistic" "orientational pluralism," largely adopted from Nicholas Rescher[51] and deeply effected by DiNoia's inclusivistic thoughts. Heim believes it is possible to be a pluralist while entirely remaining committed to one's particularist beliefs.[52] That is to say, there are different salvations and different ways to achieve them, i.e. divergent religions offer different salvations, equally effective and equally true from different orients. He also claims that the salvational ends of religions are different and cannot be converged into one. He finishes by saying that "Truth is one. Our ways are many. Our ends are distinct"[53] or to use one of his subheadings: "many true religions... and each the only way."[54] The ultimate relativism of Milbank, Heim, and Rescher has been rightly criticised by Anselm K Min.[55] Against the claim of Milbank and Heim's different "*concepts*" *of* justice among religions and cultures, Min argues vehemently that:

> "There is a common longing for the *reality* of justice in the sense of basic fairness in treatment and basic freedom from genocide and externally imposed material suffering and political oppression... all of them demand a minimum of justice, namely, security of life and basic fairness in the distribution and exercise of economic and political power. The *theory* of justice, its concept and justification, may indeed be different from religion to religion, but

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[50] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 316.
[51] Rescher, N, *The Strife of Systems: An Essay on the Grounds and Implications of Philosophical Diversity*. Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1985.
[52] Nasr puts forward a similar argument, but less relativist, derived from philosophia perennis which claims that different religions in their unique forms are "relatively absolute," for only "the Absolute is absolute" (192). (See for more: Nasr, S H, *"The Philosophia Perennis and the Study of Religion,"* in The World's Religious Traditions, ed. F Whaling, Edinburgh: T & T Clark: 1984, 181-200).
[53] See for more Heim, S M, *"Salvations: A More Pluralistic Hypothesis,"* Modern Theology 10, no. 4, 1994, 359.
[54] Heim, *Salvations*, 219. See for more especially chapters 5, 7 and 8.
[55] Min, A K, *"Dialectical Pluralism and Solidarity of Others: Towards a New Paradigm,"* Journal of the American Academy of Religion 65, no. 3, 1997, 587-604.

there is no religion that defends the *reality* of such gross injustices as genocide and outright exploitation."[56]

Min also accuses Rescher's and Heim's "orientational pluralism" of indifference to the problems of humanity at large and their consequences. He observes:

> "Orientational pluralism reduces the issue of pluralism to the theoretical and intellectual question of the pluralism of perspectives and truth, and remains indifferent to the problem of the social, practical context and consequences (justice) of conflicting orientations or perspectives. However, when Orthodox, Catholics, and Muslims murder one another in Bosnia, can we really say, as Rescher does say, 'Never mind about others; they may follow a different drummer. Our job is to follow ours'?[57] Such an attitude would be historically most irresponsible. All religions are compelled to enter into the practical dialectic of justice in a pluralistic society and propose a positive solution by retrieving the best of their respective traditions..."[58]

Min's cogently expressed points, I suggest, give us clues why Hick is so insistent on the issue of political saints like Gandhi and Mandela. I believe that Heim and others cannot easily dismiss Min's charges and therefore think that Hick's ego transformation as the ultimate goal of religions is intact.

The upshot of what I said about Hick's soteriological criterion is that while I affirm that the ultimate goal of a religion can be summarised as ego-transformation in the form of "orientation to the good,"[59] because of our differing capabilities in the spiritual journey, as in other things, there might be intermediary stages of salvation, which are equally legitimate and worthy in the eyes of respected traditions, as we saw in the examples of two Muslims, and therefore should be integrated into the salvific process. Because of his persistence on "ego transformation" through observable moral fruits and branding theological doctrines as "secondary packaging," Hick seems to be missing the important contribution the ritual aspect of religion provides for salvation/liberation. The Salvific process might be like climbing a mountain which has several peaks and an ultimate peak, which I take as the "recentring of ego in the Real," *fana fillah* in the Islamic Sufi literature. But to ascend other peaks is also worthy of effort and reward and of consideration in a pluralistic hypothesis.

I conclude then that to be able to offer a viable and comprehensive account of religious diversity, Hick's hypothesis must be modified in three aspects.

Firstly, it has to affirm *moderate ineffability* of the noumenal Real, instead of strong ineffability. This will (i) secure the foundation of the noumenal Real in the formation of religious phenomena, which in turn will support the cognitivity of religions as the crucial claim of pluralism; (ii) respond to the charges of reductionism by acknowledging the active role of the Real in the process of revelation and accepting Holy texts as more than merely human products; and because it is a common notion to great world religions, (iii) it will not

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[56] Min, *"Dialectical Pluralism,"* 600.
[57] Rescher, *The Strife of Systems*, 201.
[58] Min, *"Dialectical Pluralism,"* 601.
[59] Byrne, *Prolegomena*, 106.

create a dead-lock against the pluralist paradigm in its recognition as a wide spread phenomenon.

Secondly, in its treatment of revelations, it must adopt a *hermeneutical approach* rather than a mythical understanding, because it (i) does not bear the negative implications that Hick's does, (ii) offers a broader and more nuanced reading of the holy texts, and (iii) treats scriptures as revelations not human products.

Finally, the soteriological criterion of salvation/liberation as human transformation must acknowledge and be integrated with the positive contribution that the ritual aspect of religion provides in the process of salvation/liberation. It will respond to the charges of downgrading religion to morality and mere heroism.

I call the modified version of Hick's pluralism a "moderate soteriological pluralism." It is moderate in the sense that it argues for a moderate ineffability of the Real *an sich* as opposed to Hick's strong ineffability. But, in line with Hick's pluralism, it still maintains the soteriological efficacy of the great world religions. Therefore it is a "moderate soteriological pluralism," though for the sake of brevity I shall refer to it as "moderate pluralism." Thus, in the rest of the chapter, unless otherwise specified, where I use pluralism and its derivatives I simply refer to "moderate pluralism."

5.2.1. Moderate Pluralism: Possible Complications

Having modified Hick's pluralistic hypothesis into a "moderate pluralism," I should perhaps deal with some of the problems it raises before moving on to its relation to Islam. I must, however, point out straightforwardly that the purpose of this thesis was not to develop a *new and better version of religious pluralism* as opposed to Hick's. Its primary aim was to examine Hick's pluralistic hypothesis from an Islamic perspective. Instead of totally abandoning Hick's project due to certain problems it possesses or poses particularly within an Islamic context, I wanted to develop a *modified version* and test it within an Islamic context. But what is the difference between a modified (Hickian) pluralism and a new and better religious pluralism? It is a question of emphasis and scope. If I were to develop a new theory of religious pluralism, I would only mention and summarise Hick's theory briefly in one chapter and move on to develop the new theory. In other words, I would not put this much emphasis on Hick's pluralism by devoting three chapters to its exploration and criticism. This would then give me space to discuss the full implications of a new theory of religious pluralism from several aspects. I would, in fact, call such a project "Moderate Pluralism and Islam" without mentioning Hick directly, not "Religious Pluralism and Islam..." However, because my initial intention was to examine Hick's theory from an Islamic perspective, I spent justifiably much time and space on its exploration. Thus I describe my final analysis as a "modification" of Hick's pluralism not inventing a new theory of pluralism, a description which allows me to utilise the earlier

discussions and arguments to establish my case vis-á-vis moderate pluralism.[60] It should, therefore, be noted, as a precautionary remark, that examining all the issues involved would take us far beyond the scope of this study. Hence I will address some possible questions within the limited space.

A critic might argue that, whilst Hick's mature philosophy of religions is the result of a careful exit from the sphere of Christian influence and the problems that causes pluralism *per se*, moderate pluralism seems to be a return to a particular sphere of religious influence, this time Islamic rather than Christian. The problems that Hick overcame in his mature thought reappear again in moderate pluralism. In what ways, then, is moderate pluralism different from Hick's earlier 'Copernican' revolution in theology? How does it avoid the pitfalls of pluralism *without* having to take refuge in agnosticism and strong ineffability? Does moderate pluralism wholly avoid the problems raised by conflicting truth-claims (particularly concerning the nature of 'the Real *an sich*')? If moderate pluralism relies on an understanding of 'the Real' as good, compassionate, merciful etc., does it not also rely on an understanding of the Real *an sich* as personal? If so, then what are the implications? I will try to address these questions in turn.

I have no pretension of writing from the viewpoint of a "neutral observer." On the contrary, I make no secret of the fact that I look at the issues from a Muslim perspective, but always trying to keep an open mind to other traditions. Thus, however hard I try to hide and be objective, my Muslim background will be disclosed one way or the other. In this respect I concur with Ward that it is very difficult for one to have a "religious interpretation of religion" "without holding a confessional view of some sort, however attenuated and revised it may be."[61] However, describing moderate pluralism as a return to the "influence of Islam," I think, might not be correct. It may seem to be "theistic" at first sight, but it is hardly Islamic, certainly not in the orthodox sense of Islam, which, as seen in chapter one, rejects salvation/liberation outside Islam. Whether moving from strong to moderate ineffability makes it a "theistic" approach is another question, which will be dealt with separately. How does moderate pluralism differ from Hick's earlier "theocentric pluralism"?

Moderate pluralism is Real-centric not theo-centric. It does not suppose that other religions revolve around the God of theistic religions. Rather it proposes that the Real is approached, responded to and expressed in different ways. It does not replace Hick's Real with the God of theism; all it does is to modify Hick's understanding of it with moderate instead of strong ineffability -I concede that this is a radical modification and will examine its effects separately. Thus the Kantian distinction between noumenal and phenomenal is still an element of moderate pluralism. One might object that we cannot know anything of the noumenal, but moderate pluralism claims to know certain aspects of it. I can respond to

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[60] For instance, when I refer to "moderate ineffability of the Real," the reader will remember immediately the arguments related to the Real and discussions about moderate and strong ineffability in chapters three and four.
[61] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 108.

that in two ways. One is Hick's answer to those who criticise him for taking Kant's epistemological system beyond the sensory realm, which the totality of the Kantian system does not allow. He replies that he only takes one part of Kant's system and applies it to religious epistemology, aware that Kant might have objected to this extension. He thinks that one has a right to attempt this sort of application and I think he is right to do so. This is what I do as well. But in moderate pluralism the Kantian distinction is not as important as in Hick's. It is rather loosely located, since the distinction is not an absolute necessity in explaining religious phenomena, but a useful tool in explaining the fact that in its essence the Real lies beyond our conceptual framework, but is still accessible to us in different names and forms, even if these are inadequate. The second is the notion of moderate ineffability, commonly found in great world religions (except some forms of Buddhism and Hinduism), allows us to make such a distinction. Here what I have in mind is the usual distinction found among many of the great world religions between the Real *an sich*, who "in its perfection, its value and its power" "transcends our understanding,"[62] but, nevertheless, is expressed inadequately in our human terms in different ways. Thus great world religions make a distinction between the Real in itself and as its humanly known and experienced. As a result, we find the distinctions between *nirguna* Brahman ("the eternal self-existent divine reality, beyond the scope of all human categories, including personality") and *saguna* Brahman ("God in relation to his creation and with the attributes which express this relationship")[63] in Hinduism; the ultimate, formless Dharmakaya and the "heavenly Buddhas" -constituting Sambhogakaya (which appears to devotees as concrete Buddha through meditation) and the Nirmanakaya (the body of the historical Buddha)- in Mahayana Buddhism; *dharmata dharmakaya* (the Dharmakaya -nirvana- *an sich*) and the *upaya dharmakaya* (*nirvana* manifesting as Amida, the Buddha of infinite compassion) in the Pure Land Buddhist tradition; the Jewish scholar Maimonides' distinction between "the essence and the manifestations of God;" and God *a se* ("God's infinite self-existent being, beyond the grasp of human mind") and God *pro nobis* ("revealed in relation to humankind as creator and redeemer") in Christianity."[64] As a Muslim, I can say that Muslims are always conscious that Allah transcends everything[65] and yet is revealed partially in the Qur'an.[66] One can, then, say that the holy scriptures that world religions have *do* relate to the Real, though none is able to express it fully, for the fact that it is ultimately ineffable. I have argued throughout the thesis that Hick seems to be mistaken by moving beyond the common line by postulating a totally ineffable Real. I suggest we stop at the moderate level

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[62] Ward, *"Divine Ineffability,"* 220.
[63] *GUF*, 144; *AIR*, 236.
[64] *AIR*, 236-37.
[65] Among several verses, 6:103 is a well-known one: "No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision; He is subtle well-aware."
[66] "Say: 'if the ocean were ink (wherewith to write out) the words of my Lord, sooner would the ocean be exhausted than would the words of my Lord, even if we added another ocean like it, for its aid" (18:109); cf. 31:27. The notion of "Archetypal Book" (Umm al-Kitab) is also an important lead to be remembered in this context, which implies that the Qur'an does not embody the complete truth. I will come back to this later in the following section.

and try to understand the rest in the light of cumulative religious experience of humanity, their fruits and the scriptures.

Does "moderate ineffability" of the Real solve all the problems like a magic word? I doubt it does, certainly, it also has problems. But I believe they are less grave compared to those raised by strong ineffability. We have mentioned in chapter three that as soon as Hick developed his Copernican revolution, critics pointed out that whichever way Hick might turn there will be no easy way out for his theocentric model. The problems with *God*, they asserted, would remain with *the Absolute* or *the Real*,[67] i.e. "either the understanding of these terms will be too broad (indeterminate with respect to theistic and nontheistic conceptions) or too narrow (asserting a specific theistic or nontheistic conception)."[68] We have also seen in D'Costa's criticism of Hick (in chapter one while discussing typological problems) that he will also end up with either "transcendental agnosticism" or privileging one phenomenal image of the noumenal Real over the other. I do not think that these charges can be overcome and resolved easily. To me the charge of "transcendental agnosticism" is more serious than that of "theistic" or "nontheistic" leanings on either side. Hick claims that strong ineffability does not lead to agnosticism,[69] but we have seen in chapter four that it does. It jeopardises the core of his hypothesis: that religious experience is not total delusion, that it is a response to the Real. Hence, for me, the first priority was to overcome this predicament, which meant to return to moderate ineffability. One may ask if it is the ultimate, flawless solution. No, it is not. Now it faces the charge of "theocentricism." But it does address the main problem by securing a meaningful place for the Real within the hypothesis. It argues that we can know certain qualities of the noumenal Real (like "supreme power and value" as "the cause of all"[70]), that religious language relates to the Real, that revelation is not a wholly mental product of human beings. These have, I believe, paramount importance for great world religions and have to be given more room in a meaningful way rather than made mythical mental constructions. Moderately ineffable Real *does* make sense to many of the great world religions and their followers, whereas strong ineffability leads to agnosticism, self-defeating and leaves an empty shell for the religions and their followers. As Partridge puts it, "belief borders on unbelief when nothing can be said about the object of belief itself."[71]

But how consistent is moderate pluralism, especially with regard to the conflicting truth-claims of religions, such as those made concerning the nature of 'the Real *an sich*'? How does it explain the language referring to the personal and impersonal understandings of the Real? How much of what we have in scriptures refers to the Real *an sich*? First, we should bear in mind that moderate pluralism advocates a hermeneutical approach to the revelatory texts in order for us to be able to make sense of how the Real may be expressed

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[67] Lipner, *"Does Copernicus Help?"*, 254.
[68] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 71.
[69] Hick, J, *"The Possibility,"* , 163, fn. 4.
[70] Ward, K, *"Divine Ineffability,"* 218-219.
[71] Partridge, C, *H. H. Farmer's*, 335.

and experienced in quite different ways. (More detail will follow on this in an Islamic context). Secondly, at a more general level, we should perhaps begin by analysing the different models of revelation at work in the Semitic and Indian traditions. Let us follow Ward:

> "In the Semitic tradition, the early rapture of trans-states gives way to the eighth-century BCE prophets who proclaim the 'word of God' in moral judgement and the offer of social liberation on condition of obedience to God's law. There emerges the idea of one supreme Spirit who is 'other' than the created world, since he stands in judgement over it and is able to promise deliverance from the oppressive powers within it. Such a view often threatens to turn into a dualism of good and evil powers, and in Zoroastrianism, which left as its legacy the idea of Satan as a fallen angel, it in part did so. Yet the Hebrew prophets retained a belief that God is the only creator of a fundamentally good creation, so that evil is a perversion which can be removed by God in the end, by decisive Divine action."[72]

The essential idea of revelation at work in the Semitic traditions, Ward continues, is then an "encounter with a supreme, morally demanding Will" which "expresses itself in historical actions of judgement and deliverance and in the disclosure of what it demands (the Torah) and what it promises (the Messianic Kingdom)."[73] We see basically three elements: (a) an "experiential element" (as in the "prophetic encounters with God"); (b) a "propositional element" (in the form of "judgement and promise"), and (c) a "salvific element" (as in "God delivers Israel from Egypt" and "directs the people's history" according to their "obedience and lack of it"). "Faith" then is fundamentally "obedience to Torah, which establishes and sustains the covenant relationship of this people to God." However, Torah is not just an "abstract, timeless set of commands," rather it is attached to "historical circumstances" and needs to be "interpreted by that community as a living form of relationship between God" and them with a "specific, morally ordered history, vocation, and destiny." "Revelation" in the Semitic context is thus, Ward concludes, "the discernment of the moral purpose and vocation of a particular people by the prophets who are called into special relationship with one supreme, morally purposing, providentially acting God."[74]

When we look at Indian Traditions, however, we discover that a "rather different development occurs." Ward suggests that "there is a movement towards belief in one Supreme Spirit; but this is seen as 'identical' with the names and forms under which it appears in time."[75] Here is Ward once more:

> "It is sages, who, by ascetic discipline and practice in meditation, pass beyond attachment and desire to achieve salvation or liberation and become able to unveil the true nature of the one reality. Their experience is construed in terms of a non-dual experience which passes beyond

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[72] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 329.
[73] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 329-330.
[74] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 330.
[75] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 330. He cites *Taittiriya Upanishad* (2.6.): "The Real became everything," which appears to be an exact translation of the Sufi saying in Persian: "Hama ost" (Everything is Him, i.e. God).

> all the limitations and conceptual constructions of the everyday world of appearances. They discern time, not as expressing the purposive acts of a providential God, but as an unfolding of the cosmic law of ignorance, desire, and suffering and as an expression of potentialities somehow inherent in the nature of the one unchanging Real, Brahman. The propositional element of their discernment is found partly in dharma -social laws which reflect the cosmic law of moral order- and partly in the teaching of the true nature of reality and its concealment by desire or ignorance."[76]

Ward infers that the basic model of revelation at work in Indian tradition is "that of the enlightened apprehension of the nature of reality, as the true and unchanging substratum of manifold appearances."[77]

The examination of these two different revelation models, Ward contends, demonstrates that "in almost every respect the Semitic and Indian traditions are complementary, emphasising the active and unchanging poles respectively of Supreme Spiritual Reality to which they both seek to relate."[78] Ward warns us of the frequent danger of hardening these "complementaries" into "contradictions." Thus, as a result, one usually contrasts "a personal God with a non-dual Absolute; a temporal moral purpose with a timeless and all-including Real; the exclusive worship of one God with an acceptance of many gods and forms of devotion" etc.[79] However, Ward suggests that contrasts of this sort can become "contradictions if the meaning of terms used is clear and precise enough to enable one to see just what they exclude." For instance, let us take a book, if one says "it is a red book," and the other says "it is a green book," this results in a "contradiction," since it cannot be "both red and green." But, if one says "it looks red to me, or in this light," and the other says, "it looks green to me, or in this different light," this does not result in "contradiction, since objects can look differently to different people or in different lights." (We should remind ourselves here the discussion about Wittgenstein's "seeing-as" and Hick's expansion of it to include all human experience as "experiencing-as" in chapter three). Likewise, if one says "God is a person," and the other says "God is not a person," this results in a contradiction, since something cannot be a "person and not be" simultaneously. However, if we conduct the conversation in terms of "experiencing-as," the contradiction disappears. One would say "God relates to me as a person would," and the other would say "God is a limitless ocean of being," there is no contradiction.[80] To clarify the matter further, Ward argues, "one will have to enquire whether a limitless ocean of being can relate in personal ways to creatures." If we can admit that "God is much more

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[76] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 330.
[77] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 331.
[78] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 331.
[79] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 331.
[80] One may ask whether those who would opt for the notion of Real as "limitless ocean of being" would be able properly to ascribe goodness to it. I believe they can in a different sense, since goodness is not totally an alien notion as far as their understanding of Real is concerned. But this need more explanation, which I shall deal with later.

than a person," and also that "unlimited being can take a limited form for the sake of creatures, then a straight contradiction has disappeared."[81]

Ward is aware that not everyone will be impressed or is ready to accept such a complementary approach.[82] But he thinks that there is room for dialogue between the two traditions, especially for some people, "who are prepared to concede the inadequacy of human concepts to describe a supreme being"[83] and "allow that different concepts may apply in different respects or from different points of view."[84] Does this settle all the disagreement? Of course, it does not. There are still questions to be faced, such as "in what sense can something be 'more than personal,' or can an unlimited being come to possess limits?" Ward believes that "such questions are not finally settlable," but with "further enquiry and reflection," new doors might be open, new ways of seeing and understanding disagreements might be developed.[85] This is what Ward calls a "convergent spirituality," but not in the sense of converging "all traditions to a new, universally accepted tradition." It is a "recognition that many cultures and traditions are engaged in a common quest for unity with supreme perfection; a hope that they may seek and achieve a convergence in common core beliefs, as complementary images come to be more widely recognised; and an acceptance of the partiality and inadequacy of all human concepts to capture the object of that quest definitely."[86]

Where does this leave moderate pluralism then? I believe it is possible to adopt such a complementary approach instead of Hick's reductionist approach. It does not have to be an "either/or" dichotomy; rather, as Ward has shown, there could be a third way of saying,

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[81] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 331; cf. *Images of Eternity*, 157. Smart, considering "the properties of more direct experiences," supports Ward's conclusion that despite the doctrinal differences between personal and impersonal understandings of the Real, it is possible that "different experiences might apply to the same entity," i.e. "perhaps nirvana and the Divine are one." He lists six similar properties: First, both are "timeless;" second, both are "transcendent;" third, "though perhaps for differing reasons," both "have ineffability;" fourth, both are "literally invisible" which "symbolises the transcendent;" fifth, "neither the Divine nor nirvana is in space;" and sixth, both are "full of potential bliss, beyond ordinary joy" (Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 173).

[82] See for instance: Rose, K, *"Keith Ward's Exceptionalist Theology of Revelations,"* New Blackfriars 79, 1998, 164-176.

[83] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 331.

[84] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 331.

[85] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 331-332. Ward's comparative remarks about the Buddha and the Christ are illuminating and worth quoting:

> "[T]hese icons of the Christ and the Buddha stand as complementary polarities marking out the path of human spiritual experience. They are the universalised epitomes of historically and culturally determined polar models of the suprasensory realm, as it has been apprehended by spiritually devoted individuals. The Buddha commits himself wholly to the path of non-attachment and discovers release from self and union with a supreme bliss, wisdom, and compassion. The Christ commits himself wholly to devotion to God and discovers in himself the Divine love, purpose, and power working actively to found the dawning of God's rule in a new community of the Spirit" (334).

The major difference between the two is that:

> "[I]n the person of the Buddha, the temporal is decisively transcended in the unbroken calm of the Unconditioned and a human person achieves liberation from the chains of desire and ignorance. But in the person of the Christ, the eternal dynamically enters into and transfigures the temporal, so that individuality, creativity, temporality, and community are positively affirmed as that person finds its fulfilment in a transparency of feeling, mind, and will to the creative source and goal of all things" (335).

[86] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 339.

without falling into contradiction, that both are different manifestations and expressions of the same Ultimate reality in different intonations. I say in "different intonations," because one must be cautious about sweeping generalisations, such as "locating a Supreme Being" as the ultimate concern of all religions. Some Indian traditions in this respect remain resilient to such generalisations and still, one might say, pose to be slippery ground (namely, the Theravada and Madhayamika). Thus, for instance, in his nine dimensional examination of world beliefs,[87] Smart states that in some Indian religions "there is a supreme God, Goddess or Couple, the rest of the gods exist more or less as servants of the supreme, or as substitutes." "But in the case of non-theistic religions there is not a supreme God, but rather a set of supreme teachers and an ultimate liberation. So *the gods are 'loose' in the system*. They function as powers, but are not spiritually important."[88] Hence the Dalai Lama declares: "We Buddhists are atheists."[89] But their atheism is not "unspiritual." "Buddhism has its other spiritual resources and goals. It looks to nirvana. It relies on the Sangha[90]... But it is still atheist: it rejects the notion of a creator God who will help out with our troubles."[91] Naturally, a theist might equate "nirvana" with the "ineffable side of God." Smart, though acknowledges the necessity of traditions making sense of each other from their standpoint, considers this equation phenomenologically wrong. Because "it is not natural for a Theravadin to identify nirvana with God."[92] How does nirvana relate to other religions then? It is a "kind of purified consciousness," "the contemplative experience" that "abolishes the distinction between subject and object."[93] Smart stresses that "although nirvana is the ultimate it is not the ultimate Being or God, but rather the ultimate state, to be classified ordinarily in the Indian tradition as *moksa*, or salvation or liberation."[94] This is what I mean by "different intonation," i.e. that the emphasis may differ according to different religions. Even then, Smart believes that the atheist(!) Buddhists' ultimate state of nirvana is not very different from the "mystical union," often talked in the theistic religions. There is a caveat though. Smart believes that because the modern day "study of mysticism" was initiated in the West, a "misleading" assumption has become common knowledge that mysticism aims "union with God, with the One." In fact, "since mysticism involves, by virtually universal testimony, the disappearance of the subject-object distinction, then if an Other is postulated a kind of merging or union is

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[87] The dimensions are (1) "the ritual or practical," (2) "the doctrinal or philosophical," (3) "the mythic or narrative," (4) "the experiential or emotional," (5) "the ethical or legal," (6) "the organisational or social," (7) "the material or artistic," (8) "the political," and (9) "the economic (Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 10-11).

[88] Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 34, my emphasis. In another context, he writes "Where the Supreme is conceived non-personally it is quite common to perceive the personal God as intermediate, lying as it were 'below' the non-personal" (34).

[89] Smart states that the remark was made in 1991 (spring) in Santa Barbara, California, at a "large meeting" in which he was also present (Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 27).

[90] "The Buddhist order of monks, nuns and holy laypersons" (Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, xxiv).

[91] Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 27.

[92] Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 31.

[93] Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 29.

[94] Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 31.

envisaged, often expressed in terms of love, of the two-in-one. But if an Other is not postulated, the image of union does not arise. This is the case with Theravada."[95] So although the experience is very similar in each case (that is the disappearance of the subject-object distinction), because of the different mind sets each adherent has, the expression of that experience turns out to be different. Consequently, the Theravada Buddhist might describe the ultimate state of nirvana in the formulae of "there is nothing,"[96] whereas a Sufi, such as al-Hallaj, utters it in the controversial declaration of "Ana'l-Haqq" (literally, I am the Real, i.e. I am united with the Real), for which he was made a martyr. In short, the emphasis in the Theravada Buddhism is not on the object of the experience, but on the ultimate state itself; whereas in theistic religions the emphasis on the object of the experience still exists even in the final stages.[97] Smart elucidates this differentiation in the forms of religious experience. He suggests that

> "there are two or three major forms of religious experience which help to account for differences in doctrines. One is *dhyana*[98] and the 'empty' experiences of purified consciousness; another is the experience of the numinous[99] Other, not only exhibited in particular kinds of religious experience as delineated by Otto, but also expressed in *bhakti*.[100] The combinations or non-combinations of these kinds of experience help to explain differing patterns of philosophy. Non-theism expresses *dhyana* without *bhakti*. Theism expresses *bhakti*. Theism with a strong emphasis on the ineffable and impersonal side of God combines *bhakti* and *dhyana* in some degree of balance; while absolutism or quasi-absolutism with a Lord as lower manifestation shows *dhyana* to be dominant and *bhakti* secondary."[101]

We have examined two different approaches to world religions: Ward's comparative "open" theological model and Smart's phenomenological approach. Despite the dangers associated with generalisation, one can conclude that both agree on the fact that the two different models of experience and of expression of religious experience are complementary, rather than being contradictory[102] and that the Real can be experienced and

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[95] Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 39.
[96] Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 29.
[97] Cf. Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 335-337.
[98] "In Pali, *jhana*; in Chinese, *ch'an*; in Japanese, Zen: meditation or a stage of meditation in the upward ascent of the contemplative life. Though the term is more familiar in the Buddhist context, it is also used in the Hindu tradition" (Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, xv).
[99] Numinous experience: "The type of religious experience delineated seriously by Rudolf Otto in his 1917 book *Das Heilige*. The experience emphasises the otherness and tremendous and mysterious power of the Other, but is different from most mystical or contemplative experience" (Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, xxii).
[100] "Devotion; devotional religion in the Indian tradition" (Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, xii).
[101] Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 67-68.
[102] Smart's observations about how the two seemingly different poles have absorbed each other's approach and evolved are very illuminating and worth quoting:

> "Both Islam and Christianity, which started out of numinous backgrounds, came to absorb contemplation as a major feature. It was the combination of the two which made up Classical Christianity and the rich creativity of the Sufi movement. At the other end of the bipolar scale, Buddhism seems to have begun without significant *bhakti*, but in the course of the evolution of the Great Vehicle it developed foci of worship in such figures as Amitabha and Avalokitesvara. Putting it simply: Buddhism made the opposite transition from that of Islam" (Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 296).

expressed in different ways.[103] More fundamentally, they do it without the radical reductionism of Hick. I believe this conclusion supports the argument of moderate pluralism that one can make sense of conflicting truth-claims of religions about the nature of the Real with a moderate understanding of ineffability, rather than a strong ineffability.[104] I concur with Ward's conclusion that:

> "it does make sense to speak of a common structure of faith at the heart of many religious traditions, and that it makes sense to speak of a common, if rather general, core of belief in a number of traditions about the ultimate goal of religious practice... [Great world religions] have a common concern to know suprasensory reality and to relate to it in ways conducive to true human fulfilment. They are concerned to provide a diagnosis of the human condition, as one from which liberation is desirable; an authoritative teaching of a final goal of human striving in which liberation is to be found, which is characterised in terms of knowledge, bliss, and compassion; and a disclosure of a supreme intrinsic value which is actualised or actualizeable in reality."[105]

These conclusions may seem noble and plausible for some. However, for some others, especially the adherents of non-theistic religions, they may sound implausible. For I, as believer of a theistic religion (Islam), tried to back up my arguments with the arguments, analyses and expositions of another two theologians who also have theistic commitments and backgrounds (Christianity). To what extent, can moderate pluralism be pluralistic, or is it at all? This brings me to the final point in this section: "the theistic features and elements in moderate pluralism." In the words of the critic: "If moderate pluralism relies on an understanding of 'the Real' as good, compassionate, merciful etc., does it not also rely on an understanding of the Real *an sich* as personal? If so, what are the implications?"

I said at the beginning of the section that I write from a Muslim perspective with an open mind to other traditions. In fact the title of my thesis -*Religious Pluralism and Islam*- gives it away as well. In chapter one, when I discussed D'Costa's concern about Race's typology, I concluded that epistemically speaking it was almost impossible to produce a totally tradition-neutral pluralistic hypothesis. Even Hick's seemingly tradition-neutral approach has its own exclusive truth criteria. But we have seen that while solving some of

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[103] One can still question the link between the noumenal Real and the phenomenal Real by asking whether "experiencing-as" render the Real *an sich* and that it might inevitably be the "Real for us." There can be several answers for this query. I believe that the common notion of moderate ineffability justifies our conclusion that the differing experiences of the followers of great world religions refer to one ultimate Reality, the Real *an sich*. As I just quoted above, I think Smart's deduction that "perhaps nirvana and the Divine are one" (*Dimensions of the Sacred*, 173) also supports this inference. As seen earlier in chapter four, Hick also deals with this question and concludes that it is very likely that all religious experience refers to the same Real, because, he reasons, the end states (i.e. fruits) are the same. However, he leaves the door open by saying that logically it is possible differing experiences might refer to the different Real *an sichs*, i.e. that there might be more than one Real *an sich*. Yet, for the sake of simplicity he opts for one. Ward also endorses this conclusion (*"Divine Ineffability,"* 219).

[104] I am aware that conflicting truth-claims of religions in other areas should be dealt with separately with a hermeneutical approach, the full scale of which goes beyond the scope of my project, though I study it at some length by way of exemplifying the issue. My main concern here is to soteriology.

[105] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 337-338.

the obstacles in the way of a tradition-transcending hypothesis, Hick's pluralism brings about bigger ones (such as endangering the existence of the Real). Thus I have suggested, in a way, to step back from Hick's radical approach to a more tradition-sensitive approach, focusing on a soteriological pluralism. I am aware that moderate pluralism uses exclusive truth criteria, hence the understanding of the Real, as good, compassionate, and all-loving, which is much like a *personal* interpretation. But, as we have seen above, because no tradition is capable of the total grasp of the Real, this exclusivity does not necessarily suggest that impersonal interpretations of the Real are wrong or delusions. Rather the personal interpretation of the Real is only *a* way of seeing world religions among others. As Ward suggests, we should not take these different interpretations as "contradictories," but rather complementaries. I see no harm using such an approach, since it does not affect the soteriological criteria that I employ. Ward, for example, declares honestly that his study of "*Revelation and Religion*" "has been undertaken from a specific Christian standpoint, so that the immediate aim is to clarify the nature of Christian revelation and to locate it in relation to other religious views as justly as possible."[106] Smart also talks of the need for a "theist" making "sense of nirvana from the standpoint of theism" and a "nirvanist" making sense of theism from the standpoint of a Theravadin Buddhist.[107] Because I am a Muslim and a theist, a theistic interpretation is of the Real is apparent in my work. The important point is that it is soteriologically still pluralist (the great world religions are viewed as different ways of responding to the Real and equally effective in providing salvation/liberation to their adherents). In other words, it is how a theist sees the Real, but it does not exclusively suggest that there cannot be other pictures of the Real. Indeed, we have other pictures of the Real, for it can be experienced and expressed in different ways. Thus there can be more than one way of seeing great world religions from a pluralistic perspective, just as there are more than one way of seeing them from particularistic perspectives.

The theistic inclinations in a moderate perspective, however, raises further questions, such as whether moderate pluralism privileges personal over impersonal ways of understanding the Real. For instance, how do the notions of "love, compassion, goodness," etc. relate to the impersonal understandings? Or whether moderate pluralism implies that impersonal ways of expressing the Real is less adequate compared to the personal ways. Before I proceed examining these questions, I must make two points clear. First, I should repeat once more that moderate pluralism maintains that Real can both be *experienced* and *expressed* in different ways. The two always go together. It may sound contentious, but I suggest that if one is secured, so is the other one. Put simply, if we can

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[106] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 325. Ward suggests that:

> "It is for non-Christian theologians or practitioners to develop their own views, which will then have to be taken account of in a continuing discussion. It is possible, and I think likely, that such discussion will enable the Christian faith to come to a clearer and more adequate view of itself, as knowledge of the wider context in which it exists becomes better known and thus deepens Christian self-understanding" (325).

[107] Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 31.

say, without falling into contradiction, that the Real can be experienced both personally and impersonally; this renders the implication that it can also be expressed both personally and impersonally. If we recap our conclusions in chapter three about how socio-cultural conditioning effect our experiences, this double link will not sound that odd. We established there that the way we are programmed linguistically and culturally affects our perceptions, which include the Real.[108] This conditioning in turn is reflected in our expression of those experiences. As Ward has shown, the two different models of revelations (Semitic and Indian) illustrates this well. Additionally, if we consider the contribution of the Real to the process of revelation, it will not be too off target to argue that the Real can be expressed personally and impersonally.[109] My second point is a clarification about the emphasis put on the nature of the Real in moderate pluralism. Because I am primarily concerned with soteriology, I seem to give the impression that the Real has only moral qualities such as goodness, compassion and love. Indeed, it holds that the Real is "one, perfect, the cause of all," "supreme value and power,"[110] "knowledge, bliss, and compassion."[111] It is hardly possible to suggest that this is supported by all traditions (thus an exclusive truth criteria), but I believe it is not totally alien either. In what follows I shall try to map out some overlapping elements in Hindu and Buddhist traditions with such an understanding of the Real.

Due to the immense diversity of Indian religions, I will be very selective and mostly rely on Ward's expositions. It might be appropriate to open up with a quote from Ramanuja, the twelfth century philosopher who is known as the founder of "Qualified Non-dualism" or "Non-dualism of the differentiated [Brahman]" (Vishist-Advaita). Ramanuja states:

> "We know from Scripture that there is a Supreme Person whose nature is absolute bliss and goodness; who is fundamentally antagonistic to all evil; who is the cause of the origination, sustenance and dissolution of the world; who differs in nature from all other beings; who is all-knowing; who by his mere thought and will accomplishes all his purposes; who is an ocean of kindness as it were for all who depend on him; who is all merciful; who is

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[108] Ward also supports this argument by saying that "one's initial conceptual analysis and one's method of spiritual practice will largely govern the "objects" of subsequent spiritual apprehension" (*Religion and Revelation*, 165). He also cites Steven Katz to bolster his conclusion: "Experiences themselves are inescapably shaped by prior linguistic influences such that the lived experience conforms to a pre-existent pattern that has been learned, then intended, and then actualised in the experiential reality" (Katz, S, ed., *Mysticism and Language*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, 5).

[109] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 135-38. Ward writes: "Thus, if the Supreme Reality does disclose itself under the forms of conceptual and cultural thought, it will do so in different ways in these [Semitic and Indian] traditions. There is little reason to say that such diverse disclosures will all be equally adequate. Before one can decide that, one will have to examine the basic conceptual schemes much more closely. It certainly seems to be impossible to accept both as true accounts of reality as they stand. It cannot be both true that the universe has a moral goal envisaged by a creator, and that the physical existence of the universe has no goal, but is just a natural manifestation of desire, like foam on a wave, which will in time return to its source in a non-dual reality. Yet, it may be the case that something of the nature of the Supreme Reality is disclosed in each tradition which is needed for the unfolding of what is implicit in the other. It may be that at a deeper level these traditions are complementary rather than wholly disparate" (138).

[110] Ward, *"Divine Ineffability,"* 218-219

[111] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 337-338.

> immeasurably raised above all possibility of anyone being equal or superior to him; whose name is the Highest Brahman."[112]

Ward remarks that Ramanuja's exposition clearly refers to a "God with personal attributes,"[113] which radically differs from Sankara, an eighth century CE philosopher who is the founder of Advaita (pure non-dualism or impersonal monism). Sankara is renowned for his "distinction between *saguna Brahman* (God with attributes) and *nirguna Brahman* (God without attributes)."[114] The notion of *nirguna Brahman*, Ward continues, that "leads commentators to speak of an impersonal and abstract Brahman." Ward, however, doubts this claim, for Sankara also states that "Brahman is all-knowing and endowed with all powers, whose essential nature is eternal purity, intelligence and freedom."[115] Construing having "knowledge or intelligence" as having qualities and considering Brahman's relation to the world "as its Lord," Ward comments that Brahman "may rightly be worshipped, at least in one aspect, as a personal Lord."[116] He further bolsters this by contending that "even in its unqualified form," Brahman is not a "total blank." Thus "certain things are truly affirmed of Brahman [such as "intelligence" "bliss"];[117] but those things characterise Brahman so inadequately that they must also be denied; it must then be said that Brahman is so far beyond our linguistic resources that it must be spoken of as without qualities."[118] Ward rejects the claims of "impersonal monism" on Sankara's part and compares his view with Thomas Aquinas' theism. According to Aquinas, Ward quotes, "God is utterly simple and without parts; is timeless and changeless; stands in no real relation to the finite universe; and is wholly ineffable, except by the use of terms which, though appropriate, do not signify what we think they do."[119] Ward argues that for both, "the Divine in itself is beyond conceptual reach. For both, the Divine manifests to us for the sake of our eternal bliss in the forms of time and space. For both, the apparent can truly express or signify the Real, even though it is an illusion to take it for the Real in itself."[120] Despite these convergences, Ward concedes that in Indian tradition the "Supreme did not appear as a commanding subject, judging the world; but as the inner ruler of the world, expressing itself in it." Consequently, "non-dualism has no conceptual place for a moral judge and law-giver. Rather, the law (dharma) expresses the true self-manifestive principles of

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[112] Ward, K, *Images of Eternity: Concepts of God in Five Religious Traditions*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1987, 7 (cited from Ramanuja, *The Vedanta-Sutras*, trans. G Thibaut, *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. M Muller, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1962, vol. XLVIII, 770).

[113] Ward, *Images of Eternity*, 7.

[114] Ward, *Images of Eternity*, 8.

[115] Ward, *Images of Eternity*, 8 (cited from Sankara, *The Vedanta-Sutras*, trans. G Thibaut, *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. M Muller, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1962, vols. XXXIV and XXXVIII, 14).

[116] Ward, *Images of Eternity*, 8.

[117] On another occasion, Ward writes that although Sankara "speaks of Brahman devoid of form, he always characterises it as omniscient, blissful and cause of all through will." "This," Ward deduces, "is a personal reality in the end" (*Images of Eternity*, 24, cf. 27).

[118] Ward, *Images of Eternity*, 13.

[119] Aquinas, T, *Summa Theologiae* Ia. 3, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964, 8-10.

[120] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 147; cf. also *Images of Eternity*, 18.

Brahman, which lead to a realisation of the inner unity of all things."[121] Ward's overall conclusion, however, is a positive one. He suggests that:

> "If there are many oppositions arising from the basic polarity of Semitic moralism and Indian non-dualism, there are also many convergences arising from the shared spiritual quest for liberation from self-will by unity with a supreme reality of wisdom and bliss. The idea of revelation as a Divinely given law of human and social fulfilment can be complemented by the idea of revelation as a teaching of the realisation of personal unity with the one self-existent reality... [B]oth ideas are necessary for a fully comprehensive view, and that any adequate theology for the next millennium must take both seriously."[122]

I suppose Ward's explorations might allow one to conclude that even the seemingly "impersonal monism" of Sankara has a place for a moderate understanding of the Real as "the cause of all," "supreme value and power,"[123] "knowledge, bliss, and compassion."[124] I am not certainly suggesting that the personal and impersonal understandings of the Real are the same. Rather, there are differences as well as similarities. Thus there is room for saying that the two are not contradictories, complement each other in different ways, and may agree at some deeper level on basic qualities.

How about the Buddhist traditions, which seem to pose a more serious problem to the Semitic traditions than the Indian impersonalistic approaches, for many of the Buddhist traditions lack a clear concept of revelatory authority and resist to any sort of Divine Being.[125] As has already been noted, "the central concept of Buddhism is not God, but nirvana."[126] All Buddhist schools agree that "nirvana cannot be spoken of; that it is the unconditioned; that the way to it is by overcoming greed, craving and attachment, by freeing oneself from a sense of selfhood, with all its transient desires; and that it brings to the mind calm, tranquillity, peace, joy and enhanced knowledge."[127] The best way to describe the state of nirvana, Ward suggests, is as "self-transcendence -finding one's truest reality in being fully attentive to the unconditioned, which brings bliss and knowledge."[128] Ward claims that "this is, despite all protestations to the contrary, recognisably akin to theism. It places the highest reality in a form of being which is more analogous to awareness, knowledge and bliss than to matter, randomness and unconscious."[129] The difference of course is the "lack of emphasis on creativity or activity in the Supreme Mind, and the very extreme reticence about its character."[130] This is understandable, when one considers how Buddhism established itself as a rejection of Hinduism. Thus Buddhists do

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[121] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 155.
[122] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 155.
[123] Ward, *"Divine Ineffability,"* 218-219
[124] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 337-338.
[125] Ward, *Images of Eternity*, 59.
[126] Ward defines Buddhism as an "atheistic religion" (*Images of Eternity*, 59) which concurs with the Dalai Lama's earlier mentioned declaration that "Buddhists are atheists" (Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 27).
[127] Ward, *Images of Eternity*, 63; cf. *Religion and Revelation*, 161-163.
[128] Ward, *Images of Eternity*, 63; cf. *Religion and Revelation*, 164.
[129] Ward, *Images of Eternity*, 63.
[130] Ward, *Images of Eternity*, 63.

not accept the authority of the Veda and do not rely on a "verbal revelation." Rather, they depend on the "experience of the Buddha, the Enlightened One." The Buddha's main concern is the attainment of liberation, not "the inner nature of the supremely real." Guatama not only shows the way to attain liberation, his experience also "testifies" that it is achievable. For Buddhism is based on a "testimony" of a "particular kind of human experience of the unconditioned; it takes a minimalist view of the creative action of God."[131] Ward suggests that "at least in one school of Mahayana, and in some others implicitly," Buddhism is "theistic, in that it speaks of Eternal Mind as the truest reality, or at least as the best analogy we have for the truest reality. But it is non-theistic, in so far as it attributes to this Mind no action," i.e. "it can be achieved or attained, but it does not prompt, help or reveal itself." It is spoken of as a "simple, impassable, eternal, immutable being of bliss, wisdom and knowledge." In other words, it is a "state of perfection, far from being non-existent, impersonal or abstract."[132]

However, one should note that there are other interpretations of nirvana in Buddhism. Some schools in Mahayana thought, particularly some Chinese and Japanese schools, are even closer to theism. One school influenced by *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*[133] clearly favours a "doctrine of personal saviour." The book opens up with an affirmation: "I take refuge in the greatly compassionate one, the Saviour of the world, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient" (23). Ward suggests that in this school of Mahayana Buddhism, there is a "belief that there is an omnipotent, omniscient being which can appear within the world and help people towards liberation."[134] In some others "there is the 'rich' doctrine of a Cosmic Body of bliss, omniscience, and compassion, from which emanate endless worlds of suffering, with the aim of bringing all finite beings to Release by realising the germ of the Buddha-nature (the *tathagatagarbha*) within themselves. In most of the richer versions, there are Bodhisattvas in paradisaical worlds who actively help on the way to Release."[135]

Ward concludes that "the ultimate goal of nirvana can be conceived" in several ways. It may be seen as a "permanent state of bliss, other than all conditioned elements of the world." It can be thought of as "this world, when apprehended by a mind free of the illusion produced by desire." It may be understood as "the realisation of ultimate unity with a Cosmic Absolute, omniscient and all-compassionate." All three share the conviction that "it is possible to be liberated from this realm of desire and suffering, to apprehend supreme bliss and wisdom." Ward believes that theism "offers yet another interpretation of that

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131 Ward, *Images of Eternity*, 63-64; cf. 68.
132 Ward, *Images of Eternity*, 64.
133 *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*, trans. Y S Hakeda, New York: Columbia U P, 1967. The book is traditionally attributed to the second-century Indian thinker, Asvaghosha, but is completely available in only in a sixth century Chinese text.
134 Ward, *Images of Eternity*, 70; cf. *Religion and Revelation*, 171.
135 Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 171.

ultimate goal, characterising the Supreme Reality of bliss and wisdom by the use of the concept of God."[136]

In his overall assessment, Ward contends that, despite the apparent opposition of "Buddhist world-view and discipline" to theism, "even in its Madhyamaka form, for which any absolute is denied, reality is taken to be very different from the way it appears to the senses and the conceptualising mind. It has the character of *wisdom*, *compassion* and *bliss*, though these are not properties of any finite mind or state of human consciousness. They are characteristics of reality itself, when rightly apprehended. At an admittedly rather abstract level, this is not as different as might at first seem to be the case from the theistic, beatific vision of a *God who possesses supreme wisdom*, *compassion*, and *bliss*, and who is immediately present to all finite entities."[137] Comparing the Vedantic and Buddhist understandings of the nature of the Real, Ward observes:

> "Here, views can vary from a very active, personalist view of God to the quietist and passive notion of the Void. The Buddhist account is the most agnostic or reticent of all; yet the use of personal terms connoting wisdom, compassion and knowledge, awareness and bliss is fairly common with regard to the ultimately real. The Vedantins explicitly use the model of the Self, though that is construed as primarily knowledge and bliss, without creative action being an essential or fully real part of its being. Nevertheless both Buddhists and Vedantins speak of avatars or of Bodhisattvas who represent creative and saving actions on behalf of other sentient beings, and so an active element is not completely absent in these views, even when it is only a relatively minor theme in the structure (though not necessarily a minor one in the practical devotional life believers)."[138]

Does this brief survey of Indian traditions lead one to conclude that all religions worship the same God? One can hardly say so, especially after considering the disinterest of the Buddhists towards such a notion. In fact, I did not attempt to show that they worship the same God. Rather my aim was to substantiate the argument of moderate pluralism that Real can be experienced and expressed in different ways and, at some deeper level, the great world religions share some common values and notions which point to this understanding. I believe, through the examination of Ward's analysis, I have shown that certain aspects of the Real are revealed in great world religions, such as that it is "supreme value and power, wisdom, knowledge and bliss." Certainly, not all of them shares and ascribes the same sets of values and qualities to the Real in the same way, they overlap and crisscross according to the emphasis given on a certain dimension of religion in a certain tradition.[139] Thus, as Ward puts it, from a theistic perspective, "the Buddhist way affirms the primacy of the practical, in religious life. The goal of liberation from attachment and a personal realisation of wisdom, compassion, and bliss takes precedence over any requirement of assent to

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[136] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 171-172.
[137] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 166, my emphasis.
[138] Ward, *Images of Eternity*, 76.
[139] It is worth remembering here the Wittgenstein's theory of "family resemblances" and Hick's application of it to religion.

'correct' beliefs. The source of religious revelation is located in the attainment of such a goal, and its primary function is to offer the most skilful means to lead others towards it."[140]

My short study of Hindu and Buddhist traditions has established that a link can be found between the theistic and non-theistic concepts of the Real as personal and impersonal. Despite the seemingly opposing concepts of the Real both ways profess to hold, at a deeper level, they *do* share a concept of the Real as "supreme value and power,"[141] "knowledge, bliss, and compassion."[142] I suppose moderate pluralism must now face the questions: "why choose these characteristics but not others" and "what are the criteria to do so." Again, according to what criteria, does moderate pluralism exclude certain experiences (e.g. Satanism and Nazism) and expressions (e.g. uncomppasionate, evil, etc.) of the Real as inauthentic? These are certainly difficult questions which do not have easy answers.

I believe that it is hardly possible that one can have objective and universally accepted criteria to decide what characteristics of the Real *an sich* can be known. One way of doing this is to take the concept of one's own tradition and try to find traces of that concept in other traditions (e.g. the comparative approach of Ward). Another way is to examine the concepts of the Real in great world religions and compare and contrast these with each other to see if they refer to the same entity (e.g. the phenomenological approach of Smart).[143] To establish my point, I began with a premise that implied more of the first approach, while including some of the latter as well. I stated that religious experience is no delusion and that certain aspects of the Real can be known to us, such as goodness, being the supreme value and power, wisdom, knowledge and bliss. I conceded that this premise sounds tradition specific, i.e. theistic. In order to substantiate the viability of this premise, I appealed to both approaches, comparative and phenomenological. The result was that despite their striking differences at first sight, personal and impersonal concepts of the Real appeared to support the initial premise of moderate pluralism. Therefore it was possible to conclude that certain characteristics of the Real can be known to us. But why these specific characteristics, not the others? The answer has a dual-aspect and is probably a circular one. I suggest that these characteristics are both attested by the great world traditions at different levels and their fruits are also demonstrated in the lives of saints and the followers of those traditions. This is the duality. That is to say, in the Semitic traditions, these characteristics are more apparent at the theoretical level and their fruits can be seen to be demonstrated in the lives of saints. In the Indian traditions, however, the fruits of these characteristics are more apparent at the practical level, i.e. in the lives of the saints, and at a deeper level, theoretically, can be seen to be related to the Real. This is how it seems to be, at least from

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[140] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 173.
[141] Ward, *"Divine Ineffability,"* 218-219
[142] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 337-338.
[143] Hick's Kantian approach of course offers a different way, which I rejected due to its reductionism and agnosticism.

a theistic perspective. But why draw the line under these specific characteristics? This is where the circularity comes. Initially I choose certain characteristics of the Real, which are more common to some traditions than others as related to the Real, and then tried to substantiate the authenticity of these characteristics by appealing to those traditions. In chapter four, we have seen a similar discussion between Hick and Wainwright about the nature of the Real.[144] They both agreed that circularity in comprehensive theories cannot be avoided. If one believes in a naturalistic explanation of religion, one uses naturalistic assumptions to support it. Likewise, a Christian uses Christian criteria, a Muslim uses Islamic criteria; in short, all appeal to internal criteria valid within those systems. I think Hick is right in his conclusion that "there are no non-circular ways of establishing fundamental positions," when one speaks "from within the circle of religious faith, not professing to establish the validity of that faith."[145] However, the difference between my position and Hick's is that while I can appeal to the teachings of the great world religions through moderate ineffability, he cannot do so for he advocates the strong ineffability of the Real *an sich*.[146] Consequently, I can say that certain aspects of the Real *an sich* (e.g. compassion, wisdom and bliss) can be known to us, because the traditions teach them; but Hick cannot do so justifiably, since these teachings do not apply to the Real *an sich*. The argument is by no means over. I am aware that it is circular and makes exclusive truth claims, but I can reasonably hold that the notion of the Real moderate pluralism offers is shared by great world traditions.

The truth criteria that moderate pluralism advocates certainly excludes certain experiences (e.g. Satanism, Nazism, etc.) and expressions of the Real (e.g. uncompassionate, evil, etc.). But how can one know that these are not the right responses to the Real and according to what criteria? We have two criteria to judge with these kinds of assertions related to the Real. One is the basic notion of the Real that moderate pluralism argues for as "compassion, wisdom, bliss, supreme value and power" which is taught by the great world religions. In this sense, like Hick's, moderate pluralism is also "explicitly a *religious* interpretation of religion." It, too, "starts from the basic faith that religious experience is not purely imaginative projection but is also a cognitive response to a transcendent reality" and "originates within a particular religious tradition"[147] -Christianity in Hick's case and Islam in my own. Then one recognises the characteristics of the Real as the confirmation of divine presence in one's religious tradition. At this juncture, it is worth noticing that, as Hick points out, "religious experience and its fruits in life cohere together."[148] Now when we look at the claims of the experiences of the Real as "uncompassionate, evil, etc." resulting in fruits such as *hatred, misery, unkindness, violence, etc.*, we can say that these are not authentic experiences of the Real. Put bluntly,

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[144] See: 4.4.1. "Between Transcendentality and Causality."
[145] *ROF*, 78-79.
[146] Wainwright, *"Review of The Rainbow of Faiths,"* 126.
[147] Hick, *"The Possibility,"* 164.
[148] Hick, *"The Possibility,"* 164.

the "uncompassionate, evil, etc." claims of the Real not only contradicts the notion of the Real found in the teachings of the great world religions, but also the fruits they bear are grossly the opposite of what we can find in the exemplary lives of saints and witness in the daily lives of the devout followers of the religions who live by their beliefs. This first criterion is also backed up by the second which is what Hick calls a "basic moral insight which Christians have received from Christian teachings, Jews from Jewish teachings, Muslims from Islamic teachings, Hindus from Hindu teachings,"[149] and so on. Hick summarises this moral insight as the Golden Rule ("it is good to benefit others and evil to harm them")[150] which is common to all great world religions.[151] So, in judging the authenticity of a religious experience, moderate pluralism offers two criteria: the notion of the Real as "the cause of all," "supreme value and power,"[152] "knowledge, bliss, and compassion,"[153] which is supported by the great world traditions and the moral criterion to which it refers specifically to the fruits a religious experience bears in the lives of its adherents.

Instead of resolving the problems by a postulated totally ineffable Real, I suggest we should face the problems as they are and try to find a solution within the boundaries of moderate ineffability. In fact, Ward and Hick more or less agree that some questions are unsettlable ultimately (for Hick they are not important in attaining salvation/liberation anyway). Therefore rather than "mythologising" religious language, I believe we should stick to the common understanding of moderate ineffability as a good starting point to resolve epistemological differences, keeping in mind that in the final analysis some differences will remain and that is natural. As long as we concede that different religions are equally effective ways of providing salvation/liberation, I think it is more likely that we have a better chance of establishing a fair dialogue about mutual and self understanding, respect and tolerance between religions.[154] This recognition is a crucial step in the right direction. That is why I said in chapter one that "how many are saved" was an important question for me. One can argue that many of the disputes between religions have started, and are still caused, not over epistemological differences but because of "how many are saved."[155] Am I coming dangerously close to Hick's argument that all religious doctrines

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[149] Hick, *"The Possibility,"* 164.
[150] *AIR*, 313-314, 316.
[151] See for more: *AIR*, 309-315.
[152] Ward, *"Divine Ineffability,"* 218-219
[153] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 337-338.
[154] Ward's remarks about Buddhist contribution to theism are worth quoting in full:

> "Its value as a complement to theism lies in its firm grasp of the fact that liberation from selfish desire is the heart of religion. Religions must be assessed at least in part in terms of their effectiveness towards that end. One importance of Buddhism lies in its criticism of authoritarian and anthropomorphic practices and images, and in its recognition of the inadequacy of the human mind to grasp ultimate realities in their own being" (*Religion and Revelation*, 172).

[155] Of course, I am not arguing that revelation (truth claims) has no relation to the question in hand. Because what one believes in is of crucial importance in one's attaining salvation/liberation. However, I believe salvational/liberational claims override other epistemological claims in many cases. For instance, the changing attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards members of other faiths since Vatican II illustrates this best. Ward's words also bears testimony for my argument:

are secondary packaging, as long as one is directed to the Real, one should not worry about them too much? I suppose not. Despite my agreement with him about the vital importance of soteriological efficacy of great world religions, I consider doctrines still as a challenge to be faced and that putting the essential object of religion (the Real *an sich*) beyond the scope of human concepts and language is not a helpful solution. Believers do believe that they deal with something more than that in their day-to-day practice.[156] They hold that the language they use does relate to the Real, though inadequately. Our awareness and acceptance of the soteriological efficacy of religions, I argue, does not give us the right to alter this course as radically as Hick does. A moderate pluralism should remain, at least to some extent, true to the meaning that believers hold. But, one might argue, moderate pluralism also proposes changes in self and mutual understandings of religions. It certainly does, because everybody -believers, theologians, philosophers, etc.- agree that the awareness of religious diversity affects, positively and negatively, an adherent of a religion. In a way change is inevitable,[157] the proposal moderate pluralism argues is one of them, in addition to others.

Because of the eventual theistic leanings, can one see moderate pluralism as another cycle in the cycle of Ptolemaic explanations, to use Hick's term? As indicated earlier, I maintain that, epistemologically speaking, there can be no non-Ptolemaic explanations of religious phenomena, as far as an interpretation is concerned. However, soteriologically speaking, it cannot be described as a Ptolemaic attempt, for it argues the soteriological efficacy of religions, without accepting the monopoly of one tradition. I contend that at best moderate pluralism is a proper reinterpretation -modification- of Hick's theory, which avoids many of its fatal pitfalls. At worst, however, one might call it an Islamic interpretation of religious diversity disguised in Hickian forms. I am aware that it has certain problems, but I suggest they are not as fatal as the one's in Hick's theory. The weight of it needs to be seen in the future. With these in mind, I can now proceed to explore the possible problems and solutions between moderate pluralism and Islam.

5.3. Moderate Pluralism and Islam

"Religion is not just concerned with a speculative account of what reality is like -though it usually involves such an account. Its concern is primarily a practical one; a concern with how to achieve well-being, or liberation from the limitations placed upon us by existence" (Ward, *Images of Eternity*, 43).

[156] In Rose's words: "Not many Muslims would assert that there is *probably* no God but Allah, and Muhammad is *probably* his prophet. Not many Buddhists would say that *bodhi* is *probably* the goal of human life, which is probably characterised by endemic *dukkha*. Not many orthodox Christians would say that they are *probably* saved by the blood of Jesus, who *probably* was the Incarnate Son of God and the *probable* messiah" (Rose, *"Keith Ward's,"* 171).

[157] Indeed it has always been inevitable, i.e. change has always been around. Every generation lives its own time. In this respect I believe the Christianity of first century Christians was radically different from present day Christians. This goes for the adherents of other religions too.

Before I progress any further, it should be noted that this will be the first reading of Hick's modified pluralism by a Muslim within an Islamic context. None of the Muslim scholars I have referred to earlier in chapter one (and will refer to in the following discussions) engage directly with Hick's writing. The Muslim scholars I study respond to religious diversity rather than Hick's work. Of course, Aslan (the nature of whose work I evaluated in the introduction) and Özcan (whose incoherent study of al-Maturidi's theology I presented in chapter one) constitute a partial exception to this statement, both of whom deal with Hick's original work partially and from a specific view point. Both dismiss it as unsuitable for an Islamic context. My study of Hick's modified pluralism then will be the first of its kind and be a thorough test of its appropriateness for an Islamic context.

It must also be noticed that my aim in this examination is not to read or find an exact copy of moderate pluralism within the boundaries of Islamic thought. It would be a mistake to do so, since the two are entirely different systems: Islam is a religious system based primarily on a "first-order religious creed,"[158] i.e. the Qur'an and the teachings of Muhammad, whereas moderate pluralism is a "second-order philosophical theory or hypothesis" "about the relation between the historical religions."[159] Rather what I shall try to achieve is to examine the Islamic evidence regarding other religions and trace possible links, overlaps or, if any, clashes between Islam and moderate pluralism. This is what I mean by the "appropriateness" of moderate pluralism to an Islamic context.

Another point, related to the structure of the argument in this section, is the way in which the two arguments are presented. (i) Since I spent a considerable amount of time and space discussing pluralism in both forms (Hick's and moderate) in the preceding chapters, I shall mostly be concerned with presenting the Islamic response to religious diversity in the following paragraphs. (ii) Despite the best of my efforts to point out the elements of moderate pluralism in the Islamic discourse, for the sake of keeping the fluency of the arguments presented, from time to time, I will refrain from doing so. To compensate for this, I will give an overall evaluation of both arguments in the partial conclusion to this chapter, where I also compare my own moderate pluralism with Hick's pluralism in terms of their success or failure in their relation to Islamic discourse.

What, then, are the possible problems still facing Muslims in this modified version of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis? There are three obvious challenges, which I will address respectively. The first is how to relate the personal (theistic) and the impersonal (non-theistic) religious experiences witnessed in the great world religions to the confines of the oneness of Allah/God (*tawhid*); put pluralistically, can Islam accept that different religions are salvifically effective ways of responding to the moderately ineffable Real? This issue is very important since Muslims traditionally judge other religions according to their compliance to the *tawhid* principle and particularly tend to disregard the non-theistic experiences of the Real on the basis that it violates the *tawhid* principle. The second is the

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[158] Hick, *"The Possibility,"* 163.
[159] Hick, *"The Possibility,"* 163.

finality of Islam as the most evolved religion, which brings in the issue of the Qur'an as the final and full revelation of Allah/God and the prophecy of Muhammad as the final prophet, i.e. Islam is not the only or the best way to salvation, but one among many. The third is whether the soteriological criterion put forward by moderate pluralism corresponds to the theory of salvation (*falah* or *najat*) in Islam. Lastly, I shall illustrate the hermeneutical approach I included in moderate pluralism within the Islamic context. There are also minor problems like mission and dialogue which I shall deal with in the general conclusions, but they are not the primary aim of this study.

Even though all the three points are interrelated, I will try to focus on the first to begin with. Much of the Islamic literature on pluralism tends to rely heavily on Qur'anic verses and rarely quotes the sayings of the Prophet, *hadith*. Thus both because of the importance of the of the following hadith and also to balance the weight of the argument towards the sayings of the Prophet, I shall start examining the Islamic case with a popular quotation from the hadith collection: "Every child is born with an innate capacity for *submission to God*, i.e. islam; it is her/his *parents* that Christianise, Judaise or Magianise her/him, as an animal delivers a perfect baby animal. Do you find it mutilated?"[160] The hadith makes two important points vis-a-vis pluralism as we have seen in Hick's hypothesis. The first part signals what Hick calls "the right to believe."[161] He believes that a human being can be defined as a "worshipping animal, with an ingrained propensity to construe his world religiously,"[162] which projects itself in the lives of human beings in the formation of their religiosity as an "inclining cause" in the modern days and as a "determining cause" in the primitive era.[163] Another verse from the Qur'an makes a similar statement to the hadith quoted above: "So set your face truly to the religion being upright, the nature in which Allah has made mankind: No change (there is) in the work (wrought) by Allah: that is the true Religion. But most among mankind know not."[164] Combining the two together, Ismail R al-Faruqi calls Islam "*din al-fitrah*," "*religio naturalis*" or "*Ur-Religion*"[165] in both senses of the word, that is (i) Islam as the institutionalised religion and (ii) *islam* as the general name for the messages of the prophets conveyed throughout history ("the religion of God"). In this second sense *islam* is synonymous with faith in one God, *tawhid*. Therefore all previous prophets are called muslims in the Qur'an in several places.[166] As with other places where "*islam*" is mentioned, especially 2:19 and 3:85, which I will examine in detail later, here I partially agree with al-Faruqi and partially disagree. I suppose he is right in saying that Muhammad did not bring anything new as far as the essence of the message is concerned and that he was affirming what the previous

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[160] Reported by all authentic hadith collections. This one is in al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol 2, hadith no. 467.
[161] *AIR*, 227-229.
[162] *FK*, 136.
[163] *FK*, 137.
[164] *The Qur'an* 30:30.
[165] al-Faruqi, *"Islam and Other Faiths,"* 93-96.
[166] *The Qur'an* 2:135; 3:67, 95; 4:123; 6:79,161; 10:105; 16:120, 123; 20:31.

prophets have all preached. In understanding these references to *al-fitrah* as "the primordial religiosity," Aslan and Ayoub concur with my conclusions.[167] But I disagree with al-Faruqi in his inclusivist understanding that Islam, the institutionalised religion, can be equated with the *religio naturalis*,[168] since this contradicts divine justice and the spirit of Islam due to the fact right from birth the majority of the world's population is destined to be underprivileged in terms of salvational/liberational matters because of the wrong environment they are born into. In other words, the inclusivist understanding of al-Faruqi violates the pluralistic option that different religions are salvifically effective different ways to the Real and that an all-loving, compassionate Ultimate Being does not deprive human beings of salvation/liberation for something which they have no hand in. This brings us to the second part of the hadith.

In the second part of the hadith we witness the statement of what Hick calls the accident of birth in choosing one's religion.[169] The majority of the followers of the religions choose or rather follow this or that religion because they are brought up with it. Thus one is a Muslim or a Christian or a Buddhist, etc. depending on which environment one is born into. The question I would like raise here is this: "Is the diversity of religions divinely designed?" Or if I put it in Hick's words: "What is the contribution of the Real in the diversity of religions, if there is any?"[170] Rose detects that according to Hick's understanding there are two causes of the diversity of religions: the human differences and the "revelatory openness" of the Real.[171] Even though the Real is not a direct contributor in the diversity of religions in Hick's case, it is only partial, I suggest that in Islam's case it goes further than that; it is a direct wilful involvement. I believe that religious plurality is our destiny and purposely designed by the Ultimate Reality. This is what I call "the principle of plurality," meaning that the intrinsic principle in Islam is pluralism not exclusivism or inclusivism. This applies not only to religions but also to other areas of human existence, such as race, culture and language. Bernard Lewis cogently puts it:

> "Unlike most earlier religious documents," the Qur'an "shows awareness of religion as a category of phenomena, and not merely as single phenomenon. There is not just one religion; there are religions... The notion of religion as a class or category, in which Islam is one and

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[167] Aslan, *Religious Pluralism*, 102; Ayoub, *"The Word of God and the Voices of Humanity,"* 62-63.

[168] al-Faruqi, I R, *"Islam and Other Faiths,"* 94.

[169] In addressing this matter, Hick writes:

> "... it is a fact evident to ordinary people (even though not always taken into account by theologians) that in the great majority of the cases -say 98 or 99 per cent- the religion in which a person believes and the which he adheres depends upon where he was born. That is to say, if someone is born to Muslim parents in Egypt or Pakistan, that person is very likely to be a Muslim; if to Buddhist parents in Sri Lanka or Burma, that person is very likely to be a Buddhist; if to Hindu parent in India, that person is very likely to a Hindu; if to Christian parents in Europe or the Americas, that person is very likely to be a Christian" *GHMN*, 44; see also *GUF*, 132.

[170] By the Real, I refer to the modified notion of the real which has moderate ineffability. For Hick, my question probably does not exist, since the noumenal Real is beyond the capability of human conception.

[171] Rose, *Knowing the Real*, 131-132.

in which besides Islam there are others, seems to have been present from the advent of the Islamic dispensation."[172]

Therefore, in line with the Biblical narrative of the city of Babylon and the tower of Babel,[173] the Qur'an attests that even though humankind started to their journey in unity as one community, the divine will prevailed in plurality in order to give chance to humankind to compete in good deeds. Let us look at the following verses:

> "Mankind was one single community and Allah sent (unto them) prophets as bearers of glad tidings and as warners, and revealed therewith the Book with the truth that it might judge between mankind concerning that wherein they differed. And only those unto whom (the Book) was given differed concerning it, after clear proofs had come unto them, through hatred one of another..."[174]
>
> "... Had Allah willed He could have made you one community. But that he may try you by that which He has given you (He has made you as you are). So vie with one another in good works. Unto Allah you will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein you differ."[175]

So humanity's religious journey is from unity to diversity according to the Qur'an. Commenting on the second verse, Ayoub states that "human diversity is a divinely instituted, or at least divinely sanctioned phenomenon."[176] But we should be careful about what is meant by diversity. It is neither total relativism nor chaos. Because of the essential underlying unity and the universality of revelation, it is as a *diversity within unity*. "Although prophets are many," Ayoub observes, "their essential message is one. But within this unity of creation , there must be from the Qur'anic point of view a diversity of human ethnic, linguistic and religious identity."[177] Confirming the principal of plurality, he further states that "religious diversity is a normal human situation. It is the consequence of the diversity of human cultures, languages, races and different environments."[178] I beg to differ here from Ayoub about the consequential relationship between religion and the other components listed. Even though they have a contribution to diversity, I would not suggest that they are the direct reasons. Different cultures, languages, races and environments can also share the same religion, as is the case with the universal religions. For me the main reason lies primarily in the revelatory openness of the Real, viz. diversity, be it religious, ethnic or otherwise, is divinely designed; and secondarily, our differing conditions play a major role in our response to the Real.

However, I am not saying that since it is natural to disagree, we should keep on disagreeing, as is the case with Heim's orientational pluralism. What I am arguing for is

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[172] Lewis, B, *The Jews of Islam*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, 12.
[173] *Genesis* 11:1-9.
[174] *The Qur'an* 2:213, cf. 10:19; 49:13.
[175] *The Qur'an* 5:47, cf. 11:118 which reads: "And if your Lord had willed, he verily would have made mankind one nation, yet they cease not differing."
[176] Ayoub, M M, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* Encounters 3, no. 2, 1997, 113.
[177] Ayoub, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* 108.
[178] Ayoub, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* 108.

not total relativity, but that we acknowledge that we differ in detail and it is natural, since the Real wanted us so. However, in line with the Qur'anic invitation, I suggest religions could meet on the minimum shared points, accept that they originate from the same source and work to achieve the same end, salvation/liberation. This certainly is the pluralistic option that moderate pluralism upholds. I believe this positive approach to diversity will foster a better understanding and more peaceful co-existence among the people, religious and non-religious.

Now, in the face of what Hick calls "the directory of gods," I would like to present my life long dilemma as a hypothetical case. On the one hand, the plurality of religions is natural and divinely designed. Conservative Muslims, on the other hand, hold that only Muslims will be saved. The rest will either go to Hell or convert to Islam. There could be two explanations to this dilemma: Either Allah is to be seen as deliberately condemning a certain percentage of humanity to Hell since he did not want one religion. This proves that he is neither merciful nor just. Conversion of all others to Islam, in my opinion, is not an option for three reasons: (i) it contradicts the principle of plurality, (ii) it would still be unjust to ask somebody born into a non-Islamic environment to convert to Islam compared to one born into a Muslim society. It is almost impossible to bridge the gap between the two societies and overcome the difficulties, which indicates why conversions are so rare and considered as exceptions. Moreover, (iii) both historical and present data disprove the viability and practicality of this option (Islam has never been and will never be the world's single universal religion). That is to say, the majority of human beings have gone and will continue to go to Hell, theoretically speaking, since none has confessed the *shahada*, to believe in One God and the prophecy of Muhammad. Or we are faced with the second option, which is pluralism. Since Allah is good, merciful and just, and wanted plurality as a "general principle" of life on the earth, we naturally follow the consequence of the universality of revelation as witnessed in the great world religions and confess that different religions are different ways to Allah, the Real. I believe that Hick's hypothesis is a positive tool for understanding the diversity of religions, with its noumenal and phenomenal distinction supported with moderate ineffability. As Hick states, I think inclusivism is finally offensive to the believers of other religions accepting them in effect as second class religionists. Inclusivism is also contradictory to the idea of divine justice I just mentioned. That is to say, for the reasons one has no hand in, e.g. family and society, one is either left in the dark or destined to achieve a lower status in the spiritual journey. Thus I do not consider inclusivism as a valid option.

However, inclusivism could be a popular choice among Muslim scholars because of the over all emphasis of the Qur'an on the continuity of the revelations and the special privilege given the Judeo-Christian tradition (*ahl al-Kitab*) in the Qur'an. Verses like the following affirm strongly this conviction:

> "We, indeed, sent among every people an apostle" (16:36).

"There was never any people without a warner having lived among them" (35:24).[179]

As a result of this and similar verses, we see that figures like Fazlur Rahman, renowned for his modernist thought,[180] and al-Faruqi, one of the first Muslim scholars in this century to address religious pluralism from an Islamic stand, are taking an inclusivist line and arguing for the superiority of Islam.[181] I will not repeat, however, what I have already said above about inclusivism and I believe my argument still stands. Furthermore, the continuity of revelation can marshalled as an argument for pluralism as well as inclusivism. Since God clearly states that he did not mention all the prophets in the Qur'an,[182] it is possible to extend the Qur'anic understanding of revelation beyond the boundaries of theistic religions. Taking this line, for example, Aslan writes:

> "Muslims receive a Qur'anic sanction which enables them to expand an Islamic account of prophecy in such a manner that it could include those messengers who are not mentioned in the Qur'an, including Guatama the Buddha and the avatars of the Hindus. Although all the messengers spoke about the same reality and conveyed the same truth, the messages they delivered were not identical in their theological forms. That is simply because the message was expressed in the specific forms which would accord with and make sense for the culture it was sent to. Thus, a messenger is to speak within the cultural context of the community to which the message is revealed."[183]

Aslan is certainly alluding to the verse in 14:4 which attests that God "never sent a messenger save with the language of his folk, that he might make (the message) clear for them." We also see a Hickian line of argument, despite Aslan's claim of a "radically different" thesis than Hick's,[184] by the conveyance of the message "within the cultural context of the community," which means, in effect, "different approaches to the same Real." Nevertheless, Aslan clearly does not say which branches of Hinduism he has in mind. I believe he is likely to be hesitant about accepting the salvific efficacy of the non-theistic religions without dealing with the problem of the Ultimate Reality. Alternatively, Aslan might be leaning on Nasr's Perennialist philosophy, which is as problematic as Hick's, according to Aslan, since he does not deal with the conflicting truth-claims of the religions while granting salvific efficacy to all religions.[185] Thus though it is laudable, I consider, Aslan's proposed Islamic religious pluralism to be ambiguous and immature. I shall try to clarify this matter more towards the end of the chapter.

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[179] Cf. other verses in *the Qur'an* 2:115; 4:163-165; 6:130-131; 13:7; 23:44.

[180] See Rahman, F, *Islam and Modernity*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984 and *Islam*, Chps. 12, 13 and 14.

[181] See Rahman, *"Islam's Attitude toward Judaism,"* 1-13 and al-Faruqi, *"Islam and Other Faiths,"* 82-113, especially 94 where he regards other religions in partial error. Rahman writes in his article:

> "Although their revelation is incomplete, both Jews and Christians are recognised by the Qur'an in the Madinan period as religious communities... This is certainly done in a concessional mood since these communities would still be living only by 'partial divine guidance,' and both of them are still invited to Islam" (4).

[182] "Verily, We sent messengers before you, among them those of whom We have told you, and some of whom We have not told you..." (40:78).

[183] Aslan, *Religious Pluralism*, 188.

[184] Aslan, *Ultimate Reality*, 279.

[185] Aslan, *Ultimate Reality*, 281.

So far, I have dealt with the question of the veridicality of experience and the effect of environment in its formation, the principal of plurality in Islam and the universality of revelation to humankind. How do these findings relate to the moderate pluralism I put forward? They demonstrated that (i) there is a moderately ineffable Ultimate reality, which reveals itself to different groups in different modes of knowing (e.g. personal god or impersonal absolute) through different revelations by different means (e.g. holy texts or divine incarnations). (ii) The principle of plurality, i.e. the universality of revelation, as found in and supported by Islam, concurs with the claim of moderate pluralism that different religions constitute at the phenomenal level salvifically effective ways of approaching to the noumenal Real. This settles *partially* the first predicament I set out to address at the beginning of the section: that how to reconcile the different experiences of the Real (personal and impersonal) with the principle of tawhid in Islam. I said "partially" since it only establishes that there are other religions alongside Islam offering salvific/liberational choices, but still does not properly address the question of how Islam responds to and sees them. This part of the problem is closely related to the second issue at hand: the finality of Islam as the only or best way to salvation/liberation and the nature of the prophethood of Muhammad, which is my task now.

5.3.1. Islam or *islam*

As I explained in my introduction to the thesis, I differentiate between the wider, literal, meaning of *islam*, i.e. submission to the will of God (and its noun form a *muslim*, a submitter) and the colloquial use of it in a limited sense as the name of the institutionalised religion, *Islam* (and its noun form as commonly known a *Muslim*). As indicated here, I shall use "islam/muslim" without a capital "i" or "m" to refer to the state of total submission to the will of God and who does it, and "Islam/Muslim" with a capital "I" or "M" to denote the Islamic religion and one who follows it. Hence is the title "Islam or *islam*," for I will be dealing, in this section, with the Qur'anic verses specifically dealing with these meanings and also more pluralistic ones.

I start directly with the verses which have caused so much disagreement between exclusivists, inclusivists and pluralists. First the verses which support the pluralist stance in the Qur'an and grant salvation to others beside Muslims, that different religions are different effective salvational/liberational ways of responding to the Real:

> "Lo! those who believe (in the Qur'an), and those who are Jews, and Christian, and Sabaeans -whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does right- surely their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve."[186]

The same verse has been repeated almost exactly in 5:69 with minor grammatical and linguistic changes, [187] but the crucial meaning is there. That is, as long as they believe in

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[186] *The Qur'an*, 2:62.

[187] The verse reads: "Lo! those who believe, and those who are Jews, and Sabaeans, and Christians -Whosoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does right- there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve." There are three differences in the second verse: i. The order of Christians

God, the Last Day and do good deeds, Christians, Jews and Sabaeans will be saved.[188] However, on the other hand, there are two further verses, which constitute the bedrock of the exclusivist stance and at first sight contradict the verses above, 2:62 and 5:69. Both verses are in chapter three, *the House of Imran*, 19 and 85. They read as follows, respectively:

> "Lo! religion with Allah is the Surrender (to His will and guidance)"
>
> "And whoso seeks as religion other than the Surrender (to Allah) it will not be accepted from him, and he will be a loser in the Hereafter."[189]

The interesting thing about these two verses is that the Arabic word "islam," repeated in both, can mean two things: first (and the immediate meaning coming to mind) is "Islam" -with a capital I- as the institutionalised religion, which is highly favoured and vehemently supported by the exclusivist scholars. The second meaning is the literal meaning of the word "islam," i.e. "submission to the Will of God," which is widely accepted by the advocates of inclusivism or pluralism,[190] as we shall see soon. Hence we see that some commentators[191] and translators are anxious to project both meanings, while others just take an exclusivist stance. Thus, Marmaduke M Pickthall, who I cited above, favours the literal meaning but uses a capital "s" for "surrender" to show its relation to Islam, as well as giving the Arabic word in the footnotes.[192] Of the other two translations I examined, one translates "islam" as Islam the religion but gives the literal meaning, "submission to His Will," in parenthesis.[193] The last one does not mention the literal meaning at all and gives the verses the usual exclusivistic meaning of Islam the religion.[194] To back this understanding, the translators al-Hilali and Khan write a long footnote to 3:85, supported with several prophetic sayings, among which this one is very interesting. Abu Hurairah narrated: "By him (Allah) in whose hand Muhammad's soul is, there is none from amongst the Jews and the Christians (of these present nations) who hears about me and then dies

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and Sabaeans has been changed; ii. Sabaean is in the "nominative rather than the accusative;" iii. "surely their reward is with their Lord" has been dropped (McAuliffe, *"Exegetical Identification of the Sabi'un,"* 101).

[188] This universal salvation is also confirmed in *the Qur'an* in 16:97 which reads: "Whosoever does right, whether male or female, and is a believer, him verily we shall quicken with good life, and we shall pay them a recompense in proportion to the best of what they used to do."

[189] In addition these two, a third verse is also usually provided by the conservative scholars. It is in 5:3 and reads: "This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed my favour unto you, and have chosen for you as religion AL-ISLAM." To emphasise the meaning Pickthall specifically gives capital letters for Islam (*The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, 119)

[190] See Faruqi, *"Islam and Other Religions,"* 94, Aslan, *Religious Pluralism*, 192, Ayoub, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* 1113-114.

[191] For a summary of the explanations of the classical commentators on the verses, see: Ayoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*, 66-72, 241-243.

[192] *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, trans. Pickthall, M M, London: Everyman, 1992, 68, 77.

[193] *The Holy Qur'an*, 145, 166.

[194] *The Noble Qur'an*, 113-114.

without believing in the Message with which I have been sent (i.e. Islamic Monotheism), but he will be from the dwellers of the (Hell) Fire."[195]

Aslan, however, quotes A Yusuf Ali's commentary on 3:85[196] as a pluralistic understanding "islam" in these verses, but to me it is exclusivistic and Aslan is mistaken. Ali is arguing for Islam's representation of the universal Truth which is one, preached by the Prophet and expected of everybody to follow. This becomes clearer when Ali comments on 5:69 where he equates the belief in God with "the belief in the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him),"[197] as did Koçyiğit in chapter one against the inclusivist Ateş. Thus I believe Ali's overall attitude is exclusivist and Adnan's argument presenting him as a pluralist is misleading.

As we have seen in chapter one in Koçyiğit's answer to the inclusivist Ateş, there is also the exclusivist claim of abrogation regarding the pluralistic verses, 2:62 and 5:69. Depending on a *hadith* reported by Ibn Abbas, some exclusivist scholars believe that 2:62 and 5:69 have been abrogated by 3:85.[198] Thus Koçyiğit believes that 3:85 declares the general rule, whereas 2:62 and 5:69 just posit a tactical missionary signal for Muslims in their dealing with other religions. To the claims of abrogation, Ayoub has two responses. One is that the verses carrying a pluralistic character, 2:62 and 5:69, "represent the beginning and the end of the Prophet's Madinan career."[199] When the Prophet arrived at Madina, 2:62 was revealed as a guidance to deal with "Jewish Tribes of Madina and the Christian community of Najran,"[200] which I shall examine separately shortly. Then it is "repeated verbatim in the last but one major *sura*[201] to be revealed to the Prophet before his death."[202] Neither the repetition, nor the timing of the verses is discussed by the exclusivists. Certainly there are important implications of these to weaken the claims of abrogation. Suppose the first one, 2:62, was abrogated, then the second one, 5:69, still

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[195] *The Noble Qur'an*, 133 (The hadith is cited from *Sahih Muslim*, the Book of Faith, vol 1, hadith no. 240).

[196] Ali writes:

> "The Muslim position is clear. The Muslim does not claim to have a religion peculiar to himself. Islam is not a sect or an ethnic religion. In its view all Religion is one, for the Truth is one. It was the religion preached by all the earlier Prophets. It was the truth taught by all the inspired Books. In essence it amounts to a consciousness of the Will and Plan of Allah and a joyful submission to that Will and Plan. If any one wants a religion other than that, he is false to his own nature, as he is false to Allah's Will and Plan. Such a one cannot expect guidance, for he has deliberately renounced guidance" (*The Holy Qur'an*, 166, n. 418).

[197] Let us follow Ali:

> "The verse does not purport to lay down an exhaustive list of the articles of faith. Nor does it seek to spell out the essentials of a genuine belief in Allah, , which has no meaning unless it is accompanied by belief in His Prophets for its is through their agency alone that we know Allah's Will and can abide by it in our practical lives. This is especially true of His final Prophet, Muhammad (peace be upon him) whose message is universal, and not confined to any particular group or section of humanity. Belief in the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him) is thus an integral part and a logical corollary of belief in Allah. Moreover, it is also an essential test of genuineness of such beliefs" (*The Holy Qur'an*, 309, n. 779).

[198] *The Noble Qur'an*, 34, 231.

[199] Ayoub, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* 113.

[200] Ayoub, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* 113.

[201] *Sura* is a chapter in the Qur'an.

[202] Ayoub, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* 113.

stands. If it was abrogated already, why was it necessary to repeat it then the second time? That the second revelation is close to the end of the Prophethood of Muhammad makes it very unlikely that it is abrogated. Hence I hold that, as Ayoub concludes, that "neither the words nor the purport of these two identical verses was abrogated."[203] Ayoub's second point concerns the technical side of abrogation. He believes that Qur'anic verses "dealing with other religious communities," especially with the Christians, are not "*legislative verses (ayat al-Ahkam),*"[204] which makes them immune to abrogation. The only exception to this principle is 9:29 which legislates *Jizya*, poll tax. The rest, Ayoub continues, fall in the category of "narrative verses," namely, "they are moral and religious statements, but do not legislate any rulings."[205] Therefore he concludes that the verses in dispute, 2:62 and 5:69, are not subject to abrogation.[206]

Next, Ayoub comes to the two controversial verses (3:19, 85) and the distinction between the two meanings of *islam* as the total submission to the will of God and the institutionalised religion. He warns us that if we do not differentiate between the two meanings, then we "must in the end negate the other."[207] He also contends that if *islam* in these verses is taken to refer to Islam the religion, the verses relating the message of the Prophet to the earlier prophets from Adam onwards and of their "*islam*" are "meaningless." If we also take, Ayoub remarks, the meaning of 3:85 at face value, namely that "no other manifest or institutionalised religion will be acceptable to God except Islam as we have it today and have had it for the last 1500 years," the Qur'anic verses, to which I referred earlier, declaring the "principal of plurality" and the "unity of faith are meaningless words."[208]

Ayoub moves the discussion further by distinguishing three different levels and understandings of *islam*: The first and the widest sense "signifies the attitude of the entire creation before God" and "applies to the heavens and the earth and all that is in them"[209] including human beings. The second level is the more common meaning which we have been discussing throughout the chapter, namely "any human being or human community which professes faith in the One God and seeks to obey God in all they do and say."[210] This understanding permits Muslims to call Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus and his disciples muslims. Finally at the most specific level, it is "the Islam of a given community following a particular divine law revealed to a particular prophet, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)."[211] Ayoub believes that this balanced pluralistic understanding of *islam* undermines neither "the continuity of revelation from the words which 'Adam received from his Lord' to the Qur'an of the Prophet Muhammad," nor the "revelation

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[203] Ayoub, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* 113.
[204] Ayoub, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* 114.
[205] Ayoub, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* 114.
[206] Ayoub, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* 114.
[207] Ayoub, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* 114.
[208] Ayoub, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* 114.
[209] Ayoub, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* 114.
[210] Ayoub, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* 114.
[211] Ayoub, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* 115.

vouchsafed to all the prophets with the inspiration of righteous people in every age to interpret and implement God's revelations in their lives and the lives of their peoples."[212] In Islamic terms, the basic distinction is portrayed accurately in the *shahada* which forms the basis of Islamic faith. In the first part, *la ilah illa Allah* -there is no god but Allah, the wider meaning of *islam* is affirmed. In the second part, *Muhammad rasul Allah* -Muhammad is the messenger of God, the concrete meaning is affirmed, which is what makes Muslims different from "the people of other faiths," in that Muslims follow Islamic principles, pray five times a day, fast in the month of Ramadhan, etc.[213]

Ayoub's pluralistic inferences of *islam* as devotion, personal commitment and total submission to the will of God are largely derived from Wilfred C Smith, whom Ayoub deeply respects and was highly influenced by during his pursuit of doctoral research under Smith's supervision. As is well known, Smith is also a fellow pluralist, though coming from a different approach -the comparative study of the history of religions- and deeply respected and appreciated by Hick as well. In his *The Meaning and End of Religion*,[214] Smith calls for jettisoning both the "word 'religion'" itself and the referring names such as "Christianity, Buddhism and the like,"[215] which are, in his opinion, all historical constructions that prevent us from seeing the "end of religion:" God.[216] He uses the imagery of dirty windows which, as our constructions, obstruct what is behind them, namely "the outside world."[217] As a replacement for religion, he argues for a "pair of concepts:" "cumulative tradition" and "faith."[218] In his assessment of the Islamic case, which he takes it is to be the only religion apparently with a "built-in name,"[219] as opposed to the others which are historical constructions, he, too, deals with 3:19, 85 and 5:3. He starts by examining the frequency of the appearance of *islam* in the Qur'an (eight times). Firstly, islam, as a noun, occurs a lot less frequently compared to other tenets of islam, such as *iman* (faith), for instance, (45 times) and "God" (2,697 times).[220] Its verb form *aslama* ("to submit, to surrender oneself wholly, to give oneself in total commitment") outnumbers (72 times) dramatically its usage in noun form.[221] Secondly, "when it is used it can be, and on many grounds almost must be, interpreted not as the name of a religious system but as the designation of a decisive personal act."[222] To illustrate this point, he cites "They refused, after they had accepted" (after their acceptance, after their *islam*)[223] and its

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[212] Ayoub, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* 115.
[213] Ayoub, *"Islam and Pluralism,"* 115-116.
214 In his "Foreword" Hick describes it as a "modern classic of religious studies" (Hick, J, *"Foreword to The Meaning and End of Religion,"* in The Meaning and End of Religion, by W C Smith, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991, v).
[215] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 194.
[216] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 201.
[217] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 193..
[218] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 194-195.
[219] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 80.
[220] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 110-111.
[221] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 111.
[222] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 110.
[223] *The Qur'an* 9:74; cf. 3:86, 90 and 49:11.

personal usage as *islamukum*,[224] "your *islam*, your personal commitment to heed God's voice." As regards to 3:19, which is at the centre of the debate, he writes:

> "What in modern times has become 'Verily *the* religion in the eyes of God is *Islam*'[225] originally meant (was taken to mean: for instance, by the most respected and authoritative of the early commentators, al-Tabari) rather that to conduct oneself duly before God is to accept His commands; the proper way to worship Him is to obey Him -or, simply, true religion (*not* 'the true religion') is obeisance."[226]

He even says that the original and more general meaning of the verse is "virtually identical" with the "definition" accepted for religion in the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*: "'Religion... means the voluntary subjection of oneself to God.'"[227] Smith identifies three qualities in the term "*islam*" in the Qur'an: it is "vivid and dynamic-and personal."[228] His conclusion is that:

> "'*Islam*' is obedience or commitment, the willingness to take on oneself the responsibility of living henceforth according to God's proclaimed purpose; and submission, the recognition not in theory but in an overpowering act of one's littleness and worthlessness before the awe and majesty of God. *It is a verbal noun: the name of an action, not of an institution; of a personal decision, not a social system.*"[229]

Smith illustrates this point well in two different usages of *muslim*. A Christian can be a *muslim* (submitter) "in accord with the truest apprehension as to what God's will is" of which one is capable. But a Christian is not a *Muslim* -with capital M- in the sense of following the teachings of Muhammad and belonging to the Islamic community. Even though a Christian and a Muslim differ as to "how best one knows what God's will is," they agree in their "acceptance," their "*islam*, of such commands" as they apprehend them.[230]

One can see clear parallels between the interpretations of Ayoub and Smith. I believe their interpretation of *islam* in these seemingly exclusivistic verses as the "submission to the will of the Real" is more likely to be true than the particularistic understandings. Certainly, the traditionalist conservative scholars will disagree with such interpretations of these verses, 3:19 and 85. But they cannot show that the pluralistic explication is an un-Islamic interpretation or runs against the spirit of the Qur'an. On the contrary, I suggest the pluralist understanding (according to which the verses allude to a general tendency of faith found among human beings) are more in line both with the general teachings of the Qur'an

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[224] *The Qur'an* 49:17. It reads "They make it a favour unto you (Muhammad) that they have surrendered (*aslamu*) (unto Him). Say: Deem not your Surrender (*islamukum*) a favour unto me; nay, but Allah does confer a favour on you, inasmuch as He has led you to the Faith, if you are earnest."
[225] *The Qur'an* 3:19.
[226] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 113.
[227] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 113 (Cited from *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. C G Herbermann *et al.*, 15 voll., New York, 1913. The article is by C F Aiken, vol XII, 739).
[228] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 113.
[229] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 112, my emphasis.
[230] Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 114.

vis-a-vis other religions and with the centuries old practices of Islam.[231] So the appeal to 3:19 and 85 to prove the finality of Islam as the only absolute way to salvation, since it can not only be interpreted particularistically but also pluralistically. Thus I proceed to the next point: the nature of the prophethood of Muhammad.

Even if we are satisfied that Smith and Ayoub's arguments are convincing about the interpretation of *islam* as the "submission to the will of God" in the verses in question, there remains one more problem to be solved: the acceptance of the prophethood of Muhammad for one in order to be qualified for salvation/liberation. Despite the declaration of the verses 2:62 and 5:69 that those who believe in God, the Last Day and do the good deeds can attain salvation, the majority of the Islamic scholars have insisted that the verses did not project the over all argument of the Qur'an towards non-Muslims. They claim that when one considers other verses relating to the issue,[232] it becomes clear that one has to accept Muhammad's message in order to attain salvation/liberation.[233] As I mentioned earlier Ali, for example, is a staunch supporter of this opinion,[234] so was Koçyiğit, against the inclusivist Ateş. Even Ateş was insistent on others' acceptance of Islam as a true path to salvation, but did not ask them to convert to Islam unlike the exclusivists.[235]

A pluralist answer to this question can be found in Muhammad Abduh's remark on 2:62: "God's approval or wrath" is not related to "one's religious identification or social status. What really counts is a heartfelt belief in God."[236] This view is furthered by his disciple Rashid Rida in his elaboration that since "belief in the Prophet has not been stipulated in this verse as a prerequisite to eternal reward," "all those who have had access to a prophetic revelation are potentially eligible, be they Muslims, Jews, Christians or Sabaean."[237] In this regard what Fazlur Rahman writes summarises the point very well:

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[231] I am not arguing that Islam's treatment of others has been perfect. I accept that there have been problems, some of which I shall deal with shortly. However, the parallel reading of history portrays Islam as a religion which has been more positive and tolerant to other religions than its counterparts have been. This is a fact repeatedly put forward not only by Muslim scholars but also by fair-minded Western Islamists. Consider this as a case in point:

> "Persecution, that is to say, violent and active repression, was *rare and atypical*. Jews and Christians under Muslim rule were not normally called upon to suffer martyrdom for their faith. They were not often obliged to make the choice, which confronted Muslims and Jews in re-conquered Spain, between exile, apostasy, and death. They were not subject to any major territorial or occupational restrictions, such as were the common lot of Jews in premodern Europe" (Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 8, my emphasis).

See, also Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 19, 24, 62 and Gibb, H A R, *Mohammedanism*, London and New York: OUP, 1957, 4.

[232] See for instance 2:40; 3:31-32, 4:150-151, 170; 5:15, 19; 7:157, 158; 21:107; 25:1, 33:40; 61:6.

[233] Aslan, *Religious Pluralism*, 194.

[234] See Ali's comments on 5:69 in *The Holy Qur'an*, 309, n. 779.

[235] See Chapter 1, Inclusivism-A Muslim Approach.

[236] McAuliffe, *"Exegetical Identification of the Sabi'un,"* 100-101.

[237] As Jane D McAuliffe points out, Muslim exegetes cannot agree on the identity of the mysterious religious community *Sabi'un* (Sabaeans). Some hold that they are part of the people of the Book (96, 101), others deny this, while others claim they either "angel" or "sun" or "star-worshippers (97-98). Some others believe that Sabaeans are those whom the message of a "prophet has not reached" (100), i.e. they follow "an independent religion" (101). This ambiguity, one may argue, led to a loose application of the term to those remain outside the Judeo-Christian-Islamic circle in the "easy, inexact fashion of those who despised such religions and thought of them unworthy of serious consideration" (106) (See for more: McAuliffe, *"Exegetical Identification of the Sabi'un,"* 95-106).

"In both these verses, the vast majority of Muslim commentators exercise themselves fruitlessly to avoid having to admit the obvious meaning, viz., that those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds -from any section of humankind- are saved. They either say that by Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans here are meant those who have actually become 'Muslims' -which interpretation is clearly belied by the fact that 'Muslims' constitute the first of the four groups mentioned, i.e. 'those who believe'- or that they were those good Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans who lived before the advent of the Prophet Muhammad -which is an even worse *tour de force.* Even when replying to Jewish and Christian claims that the hereafter was theirs and theirs alone, the Qur'an says, 'On the contrary, whosoever surrenders himself to god while he does good deeds as well, he shall find his reward with his Lord, shall have no fear, nor shall he come to grief' 2:112."[238]

Despite my earlier remarks about Rahman's inclusivist stance, I believe his comments on these verses are fair and in line with the pluralist understanding of Islam. (Nevertheless, he is still an inclusivist, since he affirms the superiority of Islam as the best way for salvation). I believe he is right in his inferences that not only the four groups mentioned in the verses can be saved as long as they meet the conditions laid out, but also his generalisation of the logic of these verses, namely that those who meet the conditions "from any section of humankind" can be saved.

Aslan, however, takes on board the traditional understanding and afterwards seeks in vain to find a solution in the writings of Muhammad al-Ghazali, whom he describes accurately as a "spokesman of Islamic orthodoxy."[239] Instead of Aslan's version though, I shall follow William Shepard's summary of al-Ghazali's opinions because of its brevity and clarity. According to al-Ghazali, people can be divided into three groups as far as Islam's message is concerned: i. those who have never received the message of Muhammad and hence can be excused and saved; ii. those who heard it with all its glory and gift, but rejected it. These are "unbelievers who have strayed from the right path;" and iii. those who heard it but under wrong circumstance, such as being fed with prejudices and given false images of Islam and Muhammad "since childhood." Considering the circumstantial evidence, al-Ghazali thinks the last group are like the first and therefore can be saved.[240] To me, there is nothing new or, unfortunately, very hopeful for others in this argument to support pluralism, contrary to what Aslan suggests. Aslan appears to be mixing the exclusivist and the inclusivist stances in this argument. The former believes that when one receives the message of Islam under normal circumstances, like the ones in

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In *The Holy Qur'an* (27, n. 76), A. Yusuf Ali also gives some valuable information in the light of latest archaeological research which links them to a religious group in Lower Iraq, near Basra, to a kingdom in the Yemen tract, and to the Queen of Sheba.

[238] Rahman, *"A Muslim Response,"* 74 and Rahman, F, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, Chicago and Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980, 166.

[239] Aslan, *Religious Pluralism*, 194.

[240] Shepard, W, *"Conversations in Cairo: Some Contemporary Muslim Views of Other Religions,"* The Muslim World 70, no. 3-4, 1980, 194-195.

group (ii) of al-Ghazali, they either have to become Muslims or unbelievers, regardless of their religious position in their own religion. To someone like al-Ghazali to receive the message and not believe in it and not to practice it is tantamount to unbelief, which runs directly against the pluralistic case. However, in inclusivism and pluralism, believing in something and accepting it as a way of life is totally different and separable from each other, and expected of other religions. This was one of the points the inclusivist Ateş was passionately arguing for, as examined in chapter one. Thus even an eminent pluralist like Hick, let alone many tolerant and practising followers of other religions, cannot be saved in al-Ghazali's argument, while he is most welcome in inclusivism and pluralism. Hence Aslan's attempt to prove the pluralistic case by appealing to al-Ghazali fails. Our problem today is very different than that of al-Ghazali's day. It is not a question of who heard a specific message in what circumstances; it is a question of how to relate the devout followers of different religions to a common source, the Ultimate Reality. It cannot be achieved in exclusivism because of its rejection of other religions, while inclusivism offers some hope but fails in the end because of superior claims of one way over others. It can, then, possibly be done plausibly in pluralism

One can still ask whether the question of mutual acceptance among religions is totally irrelevant to the relationship between religions and their followers? Although I still believe that the mutual recognition will not make much difference in whether or not one achieves salvation, I contend that it will have dramatic effects on interreligious dialogue and improve relations and increase co-operation among religions. Of this more will come in the "general conclusions." For now though, I believe Hick's epistemic Golden Rule is in order here. To use Peter Byrne's paraphrase, we should "weigh similar evidence in other people's traditions as would weigh its counter part in ours."[241] Since Islam made believing in other religions a condition of faith, Muslims are understandably sensitive about the issue of recognition. I trust that they have a case to argue for, but nevertheless its scope is not too wide as to convert all other religionists to Islam, as the exclusivists would claim. Thus the pluralistic aspect of Islam should never be put aside. I will re-visit the issue of mutual-recognition in the general conclusions to my dissertation.

What conclusions can be drawn in relation to moderate pluralism from the preceding discussions? The argument so far has established that certain verses in the Qur'an (2:62 and 5:69) clearly espouse a pluralistic tone and others (3:19, 85) send an exclusivist message, which ties indirectly salvation/liberation to acceptance and/or recognition of Muhammad's message. If the possibility of interpreting *islam*, referred to in the exclusivistic verses, as submission to the will of the Transcendent is considered, in addition to the strong tone of the pluralistic verses, it becomes evident that the over all argument of the Qur'an is pluralistic. As we shall see shortly, the Prophetic practices strongly corroborate this conclusion, too. Thus I can conclude that, as with moderate pluralism, Islam also embraces

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[241] Byrne, P, *Prolegomena*, 126-127. Hick defines it as "granting to others a premise on which we rely ourselves" (*AIR*, 235).

the view that different religions are salvifically effective ways of responding to the Ultimate Reality. To bolster this conclusion, I will now survey the Prophetic traditions as they constitute the most important evidence second to the Qur'anic verses.

5.3.2. Prophetic Traditions

Now I would like to present a few prophetic traditions to portray further the pluralistic character of Islam. There is the famous example of the Christian community of Najran, who came to Madina in 632 to visit Muhammad and stayed for one month during which time they were allowed to use the Prophet's mosque for worship in their own way.[242] This reminds me of a discussion I had a few months ago with a colleague in a mosque in England. It was a gathering for the late night prayer, *'isha*, which consisted of around forty or so Turkish Muslims from different backgrounds, lay as well as educated. After the prayer a session of questions and answers was held. One of the contributors, probably thinking along the lines of what one observer put "a reaction of a healthy nature, which cannot easily accept that the sincere and good man may be eternally damned,"[243] asked about the salvational end of the good Christians he saw, met and worked with. The conservative colleague instantly replied that "as far as we are concerned they are heading towards Hell, regardless of what they do, on the grounds that they are in *shirk*, unbelief."[244] To bolster his argument, he immediately quoted the one of the famous verses critiquing the doctrine of Trinity.[245] A little bit later another question was asked about *religious tolerance* in Islam. This time he narrated the good behaviour of the Prophet of

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[242] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 151; Ateş, *"Nobody Has Monopoly over Paradise,"* 22; Hamidullah, *Introduction to Islam*, 176; al-Faruqi, *"Islam and Other Faiths,"* 102-103.

I was once told a real life story of a sufi, Muslim mystic, closely related to this example. The sufi visited New York with a group of his followers. It was a Friday and they wanted to perform the weekly Friday Prayer (*salat al-Jum'a*). Since there was no mosque around, they went to the nearest church and asked the person in charge if they can perform their prayer in the church. He happily said "Yes!" After the prayer, wanting to make a point about modern day Christianity's toleration to members of other faiths, he asked: "Would you let me use a mosque for the same purpose, if I came to Turkey?" The sufi replied: "No, I would not. Because we Muslims accept Jesus as an important prophet in the chain of the prophets and therefore have a right to use your church for worship. If you Christians accept Muhammad as a prophet, then you have the same right, too." Even though the sufi made a fair point, I disagree with his analogy, since it contradicts with the authentic prophetic tradition related to the Christians of Najran, who were granted the same right without fulfilling that condition.

[243] Shepard, *"Conversations in Cairo,"* 195.

[244] As we shall see soon in more detail, this example clearly shows how a conservative/exclusivist mind works which disproves Aslan's argument that nobody is guaranteed salvation, not even a Muslim (Aslan, *Religious Pluralism*, 195). Aslan misses the crucial difference between Muslims and others: that the former have a hope of being "saved" whereas the latter are condemned to Hell right from the start. Aslan addresses neither this, nor makes any correlation of it to the notion of a God "whose mercy embraced everything" (7:156).

[245] The verses in 5:72-73 reads:

> "They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary. The Messiah (himself) said: O Children of Israel, worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. Lo! whoso ascribes partners unto Allah, for him Allah has forbidden Paradise. His abode is the Fire. For evil-doers there will be no helpers" (72).
>
> "They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the third of three; when there is no God save the One God. If they desist not from so saying a painful doom will fall on those of them who disbelieve" (73).

letting the Najran Christians worship in the only mosque in Madina, an example usually cited by Muslim scholars as evidence of Muslims' toleration of other religions.[246] However, as I hinted in chapter one, Muslim scholars quoting this example rarely think about its full reciprocal implications for Islam itself. So, even though I was among the listeners, I had to step in to point out the apparent contradiction in the two answers just given by the colleague: that the Christians are condemned to Hell because of their violation of belief in one God, *tawhid*, and that the Najran Christians were allowed to worship, in a manner which, traditional Islam claims, leads to unbelief, in the Prophet's mosque. I told him that with basic historical thinking, one can show that the argument is flawed. We know that long before the Prophet was born and Islam came into existence, the Christian doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation were established among the Christians. Thus it is very likely that the Najran Christians and others, whom Muslims met and the Qur'an criticises, were hardly any different in holding to these doctrines than a committed Christian today. By suggesting that today's Christians are unbelievers and therefore will likely go to Hell, are you claiming then that the permission of the Prophet for the similar Christians holding almost the same beliefs to worship in his mosque was nothing more than an indication of respect or tolerance? He was also the same Prophet whose mission was to clean the Holy Ka'ba in Mecca from idols and idol worship, but tolerated the similar thing to be done in Madina in his mosque. Does not this have any bearing on how we should understand Christianity and behave towards Christians? No theological consequences what so ever? I believe it certainly does have important consequences and repercussions on Islam's dealing with other faiths. This brings me to the second issue I would like to discuss in this section: *Ahl al-Kitab* (people of the Book) as a generic term.

In my discussions of verses (2:62 and 5:69) which illustrate best the pluralistic character of Islam, I deliberately focused on the Judeo-Christian tradition and did not spend much time on the mysterious religious group the Sabaeans. Because the discussions about the so called people of the Book, or "societies of the Book"[247] as Arkoun calls them, gives direction how Muslims should treat other religions. *Ahl al-Kitab* is mentioned in the Qur'an several times in other contexts,[248] in contrast to the Sabaeans, just three times,[249] though all related to salvation. Thus right from the times when Muslims started to form their own community, they were given a framework to deal with other religions in a very concrete fashion.

The formula of *ahl al-Kitab* never remained as a theoretical concept and had be actualised as soon as the Prophet arrived at Madina to face the considerable number of the Jewish inhabitants of the city. As a result, the "Charter of Madina"[250] was signed to legislate the affairs of all concerned, which initially included the Jewish population and

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[246] Ateş, *"Nobody Has Monopoly over Paradise,"* 22.
[247] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 103.
[248] See for instance: *The Qur'an*, 3:64-65, 69-72; 4:123, 171; 5:65, 68, etc.
[249] *The Qur'an*, 2:62; 5:69 and 22:17.
[250] Also called "Madina Contract" or "Madina Constitution."

with a special letter later extended to the Christians of Najran, whose special case I have just discussed. The Charter consists of 47 articles. Article 1 declares the inhabitants of the city to be one community (*ummah*),[251] in contrast to the hadith that identifies "unbelievers as one community"[252] which forms the exclusivist traditional understanding of others. This certainly proves that "people of the Book" are not among the unbelievers. Article 25 lays down bilateral recognition of religious liberties and rights for all parties concerned[253] and article 37 builds not only political but also personal, one to one, community spirit and friendship. Part of it reads: "Between them is sincere friendship and honourable dealing, not treachery."[254] Thus some Muslim scholars believe that the Charter of Madina could be revived as a workable framework to manage Muslims' relation with other religions or rather communities.[255] However, it appears that the argument is oversimplified, argued only on political grounds, not religious, and from an inclusivist point of view, given a special role to Islam.[256] The Charter might be a good starting point, but I believe we have to go beyond its boundaries in order to be able to include, as Bulaç contends that it had, both religious and non-religious, particularly anti-religious, groups.[257] This would require Muslims to re-address the traditional understandings of and practices related to "people of the Book," unbeliever, and the law of apostasy, etc. Thus I will examine closely these issues in next section.

Even though the phrase "societies of the Book" has been used primarily to designate Jews and Christians at the time of the revelation of the Qur'an, later it has been extended to other communities as Muslims came to know new religious and ethnic communities, such as "Zoroastrians in Persia" and later to "Hindus in India and other groups elsewhere."[258] Although I take *ahl al-Kitab* to be as a generic term to deal with other religions, which has been applied for so many years, Lewis argues that the expansion of the principle of toleration to communities other than Judeo-Christian tradition was made possible because of the "inclusion of the not very precisely identified Sabaeans," in the verses 2:62 and 5:69.

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[251] Watt, W M, *Muhammad at Madina*, Karachi: OUP, 1988, 221.

[252] This saying is cited frequently by Muslim as a hadith when others are mentioned, especially in political terms (see for instance: Shepard, *"Conversations in Cairo,"* 194) But it is not an authentic saying of the Prophet.

[253] It is worded: "... To the Jews their religion (*din*) and to the Muslims their religion. (This applies) both to their clients and to themselves..." (Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, 223).

[254] Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, 224.

[255] Kadıoğlu, *"Republican Epistemology,"* 16.

[256] Kadıoğlu, *"Republican Epistemology,"* 16. According to Kadıoğlu, Ali Bulaç claims that the Madina Contract "made possible the livelihood of various groups with different religious convictions, secularists, and atheists in political unity." I believe that it is hardly possible to prove the Contract included any secularist and/or atheist. On the contrary, as Lewis puts it superbly, "polytheists and idolaters, [and the atheists] were not eligible to receive the toleration of the Islamic state; for them, indeed, according to the laws, the choice was the Qur'an, the sword, or slavery" (Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 20). Hence Bulaç seems to be mistaken.

[257] Kadıoğlu, *"Republican Epistemology,"* 16.

[258] Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 20. al-Faruqi writes on this issue:

> "As the Muslims fanned out of Arabia into Byzantium, Persia and India, large numbers of Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Hindus and Buddhists came under their dominion. The same recognition granted to the Jews and Christians by the Prophet personally was granted to every non-Muslim religious community on the one condition of their keeping the peace" (al-Faruqi, I R, *"Islam and Other Faiths,"* 103).

Even though I believe that the Sabaeans must have had an effect on the issue, I believe *ahl al-Kitab* itself, as understood to denote Jews and Christians, was enough to make the extension possible. The reason for my thinking is the famous letter of Umar b. al-Khattab, the second caliph, to the administrator of Iran ordering him to treat the Zoroastrians as the *ahl al-Kitab* is treated, i.e. granting the status of *al-dhimmi*, protected, when Iran was conquered. Aslan contends that this pact grants any participant "an equal status with Muslims in religious, economic and administrative domains."[259] (I believe that theoretically, it might be the case, but in practice Muslims did not extend this beyond socio-political domain. This is a point missed by Aslan, which I will deal with this at length in the forthcoming heading). In return for protection by the state, one (that is *al-dhimmi*) has to stay loyal to the state and pay poll tax. But if one considers the *Sabaean* among *ahl al-Kitab*, which is possible according to some commentators,[260] the dispute might be resolved.

However, there could be a useful contemporary application of Lewis' point about the mysterious group Sabaeans and its bearing on other religions within an Islamic context. I believe that the logic Lewis points out can be extended today to primitive religions and newly emerging religious movements to consider them as possible ways of salvation besides Islam. Obviously, the criterion of "salvation/liberation" as human transformation applies to them as well. I shall consider this issue under a separate heading shortly (5.3.4. Salvation/liberation and *Falah*).

The Prophetic traditions we studied in the general framework of *ahl al-Kitab* as understood and applied by the Prophet Muhammad (to Najran Christians and in the Madinan pact) seem to substantiate our previous conclusion concurring with the moderate pluralism and reached by the examination of the relevant verses: that different religions constitute legitimate ways of salvation/liberation besides Islam. The extension of ahl al-Kitab later by Muslims to include all "other religions" (theistic and non-theistic) is laudable and most welcome. However, as will be seen soon more clearly, their restriction of the wider understanding of the formula (which includes theological sphere, too) to the socio-political domain only is disappointing and should be re-considered carefully in order to embrace not only great world religions but also primitive religions and new religious movements as valid ways of attaining salvation/liberation. The pluralistic character of Islam obliges Muslims to do so, which would in effect mean following the footsteps of the Prophet, otherwise this will prove to be a major obstacle between moderate pluralism and Islam. This will be my task for the next heading.

5.3.3. Religious Freedom and the Other

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[259] Aslan, *Religious Pluralism*, 197.
[260] See for a summary of classical and modern comments: McAuliffe, *"Exegetical Identification of the Sabi'un,"* 95-106.

Certain verses in the Qur'an form the bedrock of religious freedom in Islam, on which the above mentioned articles in the Madinan Contract are based. Here are two of them:

> "There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error. And he who rejects false deities and believes in Allah has grasped a firm hand-hold which will never break. Allah is hearer, knower."[261]
>
> "And if your Lord willed, all who are in the earth would have believed together. Will you (Muhammad) compel men until they are believers?"[262]

These and other verses acted as guarantors of religious freedom in Islamic communities throughout history. Thus, as Lewis points out deservedly, "in the early centuries of Islamic rule, there was little or no attempt at forcible conversion, the spread of the faith being effected rather by persuasion and inducement."[263] As a consequence of this, Lewis continues, though it is difficult to obtain accurate figures, some argued that "as late as the Crusades, non-Muslims still constituted a majority of the population."[264] Lewis' comments on the pluralist character of the Middle Eastern Region are very interesting and worth full quotation:

> "Apart from one episode, of brief duration and minor significance, the Arab Muslim rulers of the new empire did not repeat the errors of their predecessors but instead respected the pattern of pluralism that had existed since antiquity. This pattern was not one of equality, but rather of dominance by one group and, usually, a hierarchic sequence of the others. Though this order did not concede equality, it permitted peaceful coexistence. While one group might dominate, it did not as a rule insist on suppressing or absorbing the others. The new dominant group is variously defined -at first as Arab Muslims, then simply as Muslims. And with the replacement of an ethno-religious by a purely religious definition, access to the dominant group was open to all, thus making it possible, in the course of the centuries, for a dominant minority to become an overwhelming majority."[265]

As Lewis illustrates accurately, Islam, as an "egalitarian religion" which "recognises neither cast nor aristocracy" both "in principle and in law," managed to show some form of plurality and "peaceful coexistence" in its history up to recent times. However, this application also had its limitations and defects. In Lewis' words, "the rank of a full member of society was restricted to *free male Muslims*. Those who lacked any of these essential qualifications -that is, *the slave*, *the woman*, or *the unbeliever*- were not equal."[266] Of these three, the slave and the woman are not directly related to my project, but I am more concerned about the third: the case of the unbeliever, which is directly linked to the law of apostasy in Islam.

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[261] *The Qur'an* 2:256.
[262] *The Qur'an*, 10:77; cf. 18:29.
[263] Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 17.
[264] Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 17.
[265] Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 19.
[266] Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 8 (my emphasis).

The *unbeliever* includes two categories: those who do not follow a religion or do not make religious choices, e.g. agnostics, atheists, etc., and the converts from Islam to any other religion. There are three issues at hand here: first, does the religious freedom which Islam so cherishes include the freedom not to have religion at all or how liberal is the religious liberty of Islam? Second, how does one solve the dilemma of converts from Islam to other religions, who are faced with either exile or death, despite the fact that they are recognised as legitimate ways of living by Islam? Finally, is the recognition of other religions purely a political act on the part of Islam without any theological implications, where does apostasy law stand in this context, political or theological, and what is the connection between apostasy law and the tolerance of other faiths? So far I have found no Muslim scholar either relating these issues to each other or offering any solution to either of them. Nasr, for example, thinks that apostasy law is politically motivated and signals the need to re-think the issue. He even mentions that the process has already started in Egypt, Iran and other countries.[267] But he, too, neither connects the recognition of one tradition and condemning a convert to that tradition to death as an apostate, nor questions the logic of it.

As an example embodying all three problems in one, I shall start with a famous case related to a Jewish citizen of an Islamic state: Maimonides, properly Moses ben Maimon (1135-1204), the Jewish philosopher and physician. In his birthplace Spain, he was forced to convert to Islam and later embraced Judaism when he fled to a freer environment to the east. "At the height of his power and fame" in Cairo, one of his Muslim countryman "who knew of his earlier conversion," recognised him and took him to court demanding the death penalty, because he was an "apostate from Islam." Luckily for Maimonides, his case was dealt with by the judge, *qadi*, al-Fadil, who was "his friend and patron." He ruled that according to 2:256, which forbids coercion in religion, "Maimonides' first conversion to Islam in Cordoba" was not "legally or religiously valid." Thus "his reversion to Judaism" did not mean apostasy; therefore the law did not apply to him and the case was dropped.[268]

Maimonides' case illustrates well the dichotomy that I am trying to address. On the one hand, we have a verse declaring the freedom of religion and on the other, one cannot choose a certain religion, even though it is officially recognised by the state. Moving closely to the first problem, that is not to make a religious choice, I assert that throughout their history Muslims usually understood and applied this verse as the freedom to belong to one of the religions, i.e. it did not include the right not to have a religion. One had to be religious, e.g. Muslim, Christian, Jew but not atheist or agnostic, if one wanted to stay in a Muslim country. This certainly contradicts the generalisation of the epistemic version of the Golden Rule in the pluralistic theory, that we should treat others' premises in the way that we treat ours. Considering also Hick's theory of "the religious ambiguity of the universe,"

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[267] Nasr, S H, *"Islamic-Christian Dialogue -Problems and Obstacles to Be Pondered and Overcome,"* The Muslim World 88, no. 3-4, 1998, 230.

[268] Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 100 (quoted from Ibn al-Qifti, *Tarikh al-Hukama*, ed. J Lippert, Leipzig, 1903, pp. 317-319).

it becomes more urgent for Muslims to rethink the narrow understanding of the verse to move towards a more general sense as it is intended. It would require them to reconsider some sensitive terms, like *kufr* (unbelief), *kafir* (unbeliever), *mushrik* (polytheist), etc. I shall present, as an example, Esack's understanding of *kufr* in the light of hermeneutics in the following pages. Even though the process of re-thinking certain religious dogmas is a long and a hard process, I can say that it has already started. In Turkey, for instance, a recent doctoral thesis in Islamic Law examining the religious freedom of *ahl al-Kitab* during the time of the Prophet takes a bold step. It recognises "the right not to have a religion" within the boundaries of religious freedom guaranteed by the verses.[269] A welcome and laudable work from the pluralistic perspective.

The second problem was the dilemma of the converts from Islam to other faiths. They faced either exile or death regardless of which religion they chose as long as it was a departure from Islam, the truest path(!), to some other. However, neither Muslims nor Christians prevented a Jew from choosing "the rival religion."[270] Even though this sounds like a historical case, I believe it is still applied in certain Islamic countries; if not legally then socially. It has also serious effects on new religions and newly revived religions.[271] Many scholars defend the law on the grounds of state security or "treason against the state."[272] Nevertheless, the general attitude of the Qur'an, especially towards *ahl al-Kitab* does not let us justify this reason. On the one hand we recognise, say, Christianity as a legitimate way of living and even allow Muslims to socialise with them through marriage, neighbourliness, etc., and on the other we are allowed to put them to death if they try and reject Islam. In my view, there is no justification for this whatsoever. If one says that this practice was historically conditioned and not applicable any more, then the Muslim world ought to make it known that this was and will be the case from now on. However, for this to happen, I maintain that we have to determine the nature of Islam's recognition of others? Is it socio-political or theological? This is the final point regarding the status of unbelievers in Islam.

The last issue related to unbelievers is the nature of both the tolerance of other religions and of the law of apostasy. I shall try to determine these and call for a shift in their direction. I have maintained throughout this thesis that Islam's relation with other religions has always been good compared to other traditions. However, the plurality that Islam portrayed at religious, social and political levels within its borders wherever it went, was

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[269] Bostanci, A, *İslam Hukukunda Gayri Müslimler (Hz. Peygamber Devri Uygulaması Temelinde)* (*Non-Muslims in Islamic Law -Based on the Practices of Muhammad's Times*), Istanbul: Marmara University, PhD, 1999, 92; Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 100.

[270] Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 100.

[271] See, for example, for a moving account of the persecution of the Baha'is in post-revolutionary Iran: Roohizadegan, O, *Olya's Story: A Survivor's Dramatic Account of the Persecution of Baha'is in Revolutionary Iran*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1994.

[272] Ameer Ali, S, *The Spirit of Islam: A History of the Evolution and Ideals of Islam*, London: Christophers, 1935, 495; Nasr, *"Islamic-Christian Dialogue,"* 230 and Hamidullah, *Introduction to Islam*, 179.

always motivated by socio-political conditions not by theological considerations.[273] It hardly crossed these borders at the official level and may be in the public mind, except in the Sufi strand of Islam, where pluralism has always been evident. As a result of this, I believe the Islamic world had the apostasy law and, as we have seen in Maimonides' case, tried the devout followers of other religions for going against the Holy Law. Certainly, the underlying reason for these persecutions was, as already noted, the strictly exclusivistic understanding of 3:19 and 85, that "*the* religion in the eyes of God is *Islam*" (3:19), which was meant to be taken that any defector of the absolute way had to be punished. However, what was needed was to extend the socio-political recognition across the theological spectrum and declare, along the lines of 2:62 and 5:69, that followers of other religions can also be saved.

In conclusion, I hold that a clear shift is needed in Islam's treatment of other religions, which are not totally alien to it and have a basis in the Qur'an and *Sunna* (the prophetic tradition). That is to say, broadening the scope of socio-political acceptance of others to the theological sphere. This will correspond to the argument of the moderate pluralism that different religions are salvifically effective ways of approaching the Real.

Thus far I have discussed two of the three questions that I put forward in relation to moderate pluralism and Islam. The first was how to relate the different experiences of the Real (as the personal and impersonal) to the principle of *tawhid* (faith in the oneness of Allah). The second was the issue of the finality of Islam as the only way to salvation. We have demonstrated that Islam had resources to answer positively to these questions, which meant that, up to this stage, moderate pluralism is compatible with Islam. This brings us, then, to my third question put forward at the outset: the issue of the soteriological criterion between Islam and moderate pluralism.

5.3.4. Salvation/liberation and *Falah*

Salvation, *falah* or *najat*, in Islam is not as much stressed as it is in Christianity, since there is no central figure related to salvation in Islam. According to Islam, a Muslim is expected to have faith in certain principles (Allah, angels, the revealed book, the prophets, the judgement day and predestination) and live by the five pillars of Islam. These are: 1. *shahada* (to bear witness that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his servant and prophet), 2. *salat* (five daily prayers), 3. *savm* (fasting during the month of Ramadhan), 4. *zakat* (state tax), and 5. *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca). One tries one's best and leaves the rest to the mercy of Allah, who guarantees that nothing will be left unrewarded or unpunished.[274] The basic level of *falah* is to be rewarded by entering Heaven and the ultimate level is to please Allah, do everything for the sake of Him, which I believe is equal

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[273] Arkoun also notes this fact briefly when he says that "Jews and Christians recognised as peoples of the Book (*ahl al-Kitab*)," *dhimmi* (protected peoples) in legal terms, "but as theologically beyond the 'community promised salvation' (*al-firqa al-najiya*)" (Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 10).
[274] *The Qur'an* 99:7-8.

to the transformation from self-centredness to Reality-centredness that moderate pluralism supports.

Earlier I argued that despite certain deficiencies in its scope, in essence Hick's theory of salvation/liberation fits the Islamic understanding of salvation, *falah* or *najat*. Aslan criticises Hick for, though describing the Islamic notion of *falah* correctly,[275] in the end using the wrong phrase: "the state of *islam*" instead of the state of *taqwa* (fear of Allah, righteousness, piety, good conduct). I do not think Hick is entirely mistaken about his usage, if we consider above Ayoub and Smiths' argument for interpreting *islam* as "total submission to the will of Allah." Thus derived from *islam*, the expression "*ahl-i taslimiyat* " (people of total submission) among the Sufis is very common. To illustrate the point, they narrate the story of Abraham when he was thrown into fire.[276] The story tells that just before he was thrown into the fire, the archangel Gabriel and other angels came to him with several suggestions to stop the tragedy if he would like them to. Abraham refused saying, "God knows in what state I am in, if he wants to intervene, he can; therefore I do not need your help." The total submission, *taslimiyat*, in Sufi understanding requires one to be like a "dead body in front of an undertaker."[277] Nevertheless Adnan is right in insisting that *taqwa* is more common and well known among ordinary Muslims and also has the advantage of distinguishing "ordinary Muslims from those who live a saintly life."[278]

Another criticism Aslan puts forward against Hick's criterion of "salvation/liberation as human transformation" is that since it undermines the "sacred principles of a particular tradition," it can make, say, a "*Muslim lose the incentive to lead a saintly life.*"[279] Aslan seems to be misunderstanding either pluralism or saintly life, maybe both. It is true that moderate pluralism may necessitate rethinking of certain traditional teachings of some religions, particularly Christianity. But as far as Islam is concerned, the pluralist hypothesis neither undermines nor calls for the revision of any of the central tenets of Islam, which, I believe, are the keys for leading a saintly life. What I mean by "central tenets of Islam" is the five pillars, which I explained at the beginning. As far as I can see none of these pillars is effected negatively from the moderate pluralist stand. In fact, on the contrary, one can even claim that from an Islamic perspective the more saintly a life one leads, the more likely that one may become a pluralist. The Sufis are the best examples of this, many of whom are pluralists and are admired by Hick as well. In my interview, I suggested to him that he seemed to be more attracted to Sufism than the orthodox way of Islam. He said, if he were to be a Muslim, he would choose the Sufi way of living Islam. Indeed, his latest book *The Fifth Dimension*[280] is a good indication of Hick's mystical quest. Hence I believe that to

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[275] *AIR*, 148-150.
[276] *The Qur'an* 21:68-69.
[277] Ğassal önünde meyyit gibi olmak.
[278] Aslan, *Religious Pluralism*, 148.
[279] Aslan, *Religious Pluralism*, 149.
[280] Oxford: Oneworld, 1999; see, particularly, part IV "Religious Experience and Mysticism" (99-172) and part V "The Saints Come Marching In" (173-218).

accuse Hick of undermining the saintly life, at least from an Islamic perspective, is unjustifiable.

Aslan contends that Hick's position "cannot endorse the Muslim's belief in Heaven and Hell, but would praise the result of such belief, namely, their saintly life."[281] In my view, this is the wrong connection, but nevertheless correlates my criticism and modification of Hick's soteriological criterion. As I indicated in my modification of Hick's theory, from the outset Hick's theory seems to neglect the input of certain rituals in human transformation. It is true that, in addition to an ultimate aim, there can be several other, subordinate, aims of a religion as far as salvation is concerned. From an Islamic perspective, for instance, even though leading an Islamic life or worshipping solely for the sake of Allah is the ideal form of being a Muslim, it is not the only way. One can obey Allah for the fear of punishment or reward, which is a lesser form of obedience, but still legitimate one, compared to doing everything just for the sake of Allah. But this does not mean that the pluralistic hypothesis denies these as legitimate ways of salvation; rather, as expected of a meta-theory of that size, it focuses on "*the ultimate aim of religions*," which is recentering one's life in the Ultimate Reality. Thus to counter these charges, I put forward in moderate pluralism that the scope of soteriological criterion must be broadened to embody different aims of religions in addition to its emphasis on the ultimate aim of Reality-centredness. I said that Cohn-Sherbok's viability principle -that is the satisfaction of one's spiritual needs- might offer a way forward in terms of supporting soteriological criterion. The same argument could apply to primitive religions and new religious movements, that they may or may not serve the ultimate aim of religion, but in any case have a positive function to play in one's salvific/liberational journey. However, their viability must constantly be checked by the observable fruits they produce within individuals, that is goodness, compassion, caring for others, etc. Thus they can also be seen as positive ways of salvation/liberation. This might help to remove the negative stigma attached to these movements as total heresies.

As for Aslan's correlation between the belief in "Heaven and Hell" and its inducement of "saintly life," I hold that while reward and punishment can be good incentives for *lay* Muslims, to suggest so for the saintly life is a total injustice for saints in general and Sufis in particular. Only Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya of Basra, the pioneering female Sufi of the early times, can answer such a grave misunderstanding. One day she was seen "running with speed," carrying "fire in one hand and water in the other." When she was asked what she was going to do with fire and water, she replied:

> "I am going to light fire in Paradise and to pour water on to Hell so that both veils (*i. e.* hindrances to the true vision of God) may completely disappear from the pilgrims and their purpose may be sure, and the servants of God may see Him, without any object of hope of

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[281] Aslan, *Religious Pluralism*, 150.

> motive of fear. What if the hope of Paradise and the fear of Hell did not exist? Not one would worship his Lord or obey Him?"[282]

Certainly, there is a connection between the belief in Heaven and Hell and religiosity of lay Muslims, but extending this to Sufis' saintly life is unjustifiable and misleading. Rabi'a has another saying which absolutely denies this connection: "O my Lord, if I worship Thee from the fear of Hell, burn me in Hell, and if I worship Thee from hope of Paradise, exclude me thence, but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake then withhold not from me Thine Eternal Beauty."[283]

Aslan also writes that "human transformation" "is not the aim but the result of a pious life which can only be attained by the firm belief and commitment to the sacred principles."[284] This looks a bit like the chicken and egg dilemma. If we take human transformation, following Hick, as the "total surrender of the self to God," (*islam*) in the orthodox sense and as a "total re-centring in God" (*fana*) "leading to *baqa'*, human life merged into the divine life"[285] (*wahdat al-wujud*), in the Sufi sense, we could say that human transformation or saintliness is the aim of "pious life," not the result. The rest is the means to achieve that aim and the pluralist theory holds that we have different means to do that. Allah declares in the Qur'an that "I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship me"[286] and in another one "Lo! worship preserves from lewdness and iniquity, but verily remembrance of Allah is more important. And Allah knows what you do."[287] As far as moderate pluralism is concerned, it undermines neither the aim of worship to God, nor of the means of doing so. Although there is truth in Aslan's closing lines about Hick's salvific criterion, it is misdirected.

Aslan, probably because of his dissatisfaction with Hick's salvific criterion, promotes the classical Muslim understanding of salvation in his framework for an Islamic religious pluralism as a more accurate model, in which apparently nobody is guaranteed automatic salvation. One believes, does good deeds and tries one's best to lead a perfect moral life. The rest is in the hands of Allah. Drawing on the Sufi notions of fear (*khawf*) and hope (*raja*), Aslan describes the Muslim understanding of salvation as being "neither absolutely optimistic, nor absolutely pessimistic," which promotes best "the desire to accomplish a sound moral life."[288] I believe, however, that it offers not much incentive and is also less adequate than Hick's for a pluralistic framework. To illustrate this, it is enough

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[282] Smith, M, *Rabi'a: The Life and Work of Rabi'a and Other Women Mystics in Islam*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1997, 123.
[283] Smith, *Rabi'a*, 50.
[284] Aslan, *Religious Pluralism*, 149.
[285] *AIR*, 49.
[286] *The Qur'an* 51:56. Commenting on this verse Ali writes, which is almost identical to Hick's "Realitycentredness":

> "Creation is not for idle sport or play; 21:16. Allah has a serious purpose behind it, which, in our imperfect state, we can only express by saying that each creature is given the chance of development and progress towards the goal, which is Allah. Allah is the source and centre of all power and all goodness, and our progress depends upon our putting ourselves into accord with his will. This is his service" (*The Holy Qur'an*, 1620, n. 5032).

[287] *The Qur'an* 29:45.
[288] Aslan, *Religious Pluralism*, 195.

to remember how an exclusivist mind works, when my colleague easily condemned Christians to Hell because of their belief in the Trinity and Incarnation, which is *shirk* in his understanding. The way that a conservative/exclusivist mind works disproves Aslan's argument that nobody is guaranteed salvation, not even a Muslim. It is true that nobody has automatic salvation by belonging to a certain religious camp, but it is also true that some might be condemned to eternal fire by not belonging to that camp. The main difference, then, between Muslims and others, according to the exclusivist mind, is that the former have a hope of being "saved," whereas the latter are condemned to Hell right from the start. In the inclusivist frame, where I believe Aslan belongs, although there is hope for everybody, both the opportunities and the end result is likely to be better for the follower of the favoured tradition than the underprivileged one. Aslan neither addresses this, nor makes any correlation of it to the notion of a God "whose mercy embraced everything"(7:156). The balance lost in Aslan can be found in Rahman's observation that, on the one hand, nobody, including Muslims, "will be automatically God's darling"[289] by carrying certain labels, whereas, on the other hand, "those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds -from any section of humankind- are saved."[290] In my view, this is both Islamic and pluralist, though not entirely Hickian, since I disagree with his treatment of religious language, for that matter "the Last Day," here. This brings us to the hermeneutical approach which I mentioned in my modification of Hick's thesis.

Before I move on to hermeneutical exemplification, I might as well summarise what I have so far presented with regard to "moderate pluralism and Islam." I have started with three apparent questions (different experiences of the Real, Islam's finality and the question of criterion) that might pose problems for Islam, if moderate pluralism is taken seriously. I have taken up all three in turn and demonstrated that all can be resolved positively within an Islamic context. Hence I may infer that moderate pluralism is compatible with Islam. But how does this conclusion compare with Hick's version; in other words, what is the contribution of moderate pluralism to the dialogue between Islam and pluralism that Hick's version does not offer? I will reply to this question at the end of the chapter.

5.3.5. A Hermeneutical Turn

In my modification of Hick's pluralistic theory, I argued for a hermeneutical approach in understanding the scriptures. It differs from Hick's in three aspects. Firstly, it does not have the negative connotations that Hick's approach has, e.g. that holy texts are human products, which immediately puts off many devout believers even from considering pluralism as a possible choice. Secondly, it proposes a broader reading of the scriptures ("prophetic, legislative, narrative, sapiential and hymnal (poetic)"),[291] which includes Hick's mythical/metaphorical reading, too. Last but not least, it treats holy texts as

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289 Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 167 and Rahman, *"A Muslim Response,"* 75.
290 Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 166 and Rahman, *"A Muslim Response,"* 74.
291 Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 38.

revelations, not mythological human products that do not relate to the Real. As mentioned earlier, even though this is not a hermeneutical analysis of Hick's thesis, I shall present briefly a framework from Mohammed Arkoun, followed by an example from Farid Esack.

Following on the Qur'anic distinction between the "Archetype of the Book" (*umm al-Kitab*)[292] and "the Arabic-language Qur'an," Arkoun first establishes a common ground for the Holy scriptures.[293] In fact, as an original approach, he generalises this understanding to give a broader meaning to the term *ahl al-Kitab/Kitab*, societies of "the Book," always with capital B -referring to the Archetype- and that of "the books," referring to the particular revelations of world religions.[294] It is worth noticing that Muslims are also considered,[295] or any other religion for that matter, among "the societies of the books" in this general meaning of the term.[296] Since the archetype contains "the inaccessible, mysterious totality of the Word of God"[297] (i.e. *Umm al-Kitab*),[298] none has the full truth, but all has some portion of it. I believe that this might offer a more workable solution compared to Hick's humanly constructed mythological compilations. The moderate ineffability of the Real is kept intact, since nobody has the full, absolute truth and also what human beings have is not mythologies but revelations containing portions of the Truth. In this respect, Arkoun seeks to establish, for instance, a relation between the way that the "discourse of Jesus Christ in Aramaic (and not Greek; the distinction is important) at a precise time and in a precise place on Earth is related to God the Father" and the way the "Qur'anic discourse in Arabic transmitted by Muhammad is related to the Archetype of the Book retained in the presence of God transcendent."[299] His point is that all scriptures were bound with certain "historical, linguistic, and cultural constraints:" they all started as "oral enunciations" and later were passed to a "*text*" which made them an "object of scrutiny for the historian."[300] Moving on to more specific Qur'anic discourse, Arkoun adopts Ricoeur's five-fold typology of discourse for the Bible[301] to Qur'an. They are: "prophetic, legislative, narrative, sapiential and hymnal (poetic)" and "all proclaim a revelatory purpose."[302] Regarding the "structure of grammatical relations," he observes:

> "A divine *I/We* addresses with the imperative mode (*qul*, or 'say,' 'speak') an intermediary *you* (Muhammad) to reach the *they* of human beings subdivided into *you*, believers, and *they*, infidels. Such is the realm of grammatical communication defined in Qur'anic discourse. Inside that realm, pronouncements with profane content, such as laws on inheritance and the

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[292] *The Qur'an* 13:39; 43:4.
[293] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 32.
[294] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 9.
[295] Talbi also makes this generalisation. See his "*A Community of Communities,*" 79-80.
[296] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 10, 34, 54 and Lee, R D, "*Foreword,*" xi.
[297] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 16.
[298] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 38.
[299] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 32.
[300] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 32-33.
[301] Ricoeur, P, et al, *La Révélation*, Brussels: Faultés St Louis, 1977.
[302] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 38.

> prescription of lawful levels of giving to the poor (*zakat*), are bound together simultaneously in the divine domain of the *I/We* speaker-sender and recipient *you*."[303]

In tackling this complicated structure, Arkoun has two main tools: a mind that is free of every ideology and all the scientific procedures of latest linguistic theories and techniques (syntax, semantics, rhetoric, history, theology and philosophy).[304] In doing this, he advocates a "*progressive-regressive* method." The "regressive procedure" requires us to refer to the past "to discover the historical mechanisms and factors which produced these texts and assigned them such functions".[305] Since Arkoun believes that "these texts are still alive, active as an ideological system of beliefs and knowledge shaping the future," as the next step we have to follow the "progressive procedure" to transform the "initial contents and functions into new ones."[306] We shall now see a proximate application of this procedure in Esack's work.

Prior to presenting Esack's work though, I should point out that by putting Akron and Esack together, I am not in any way suggesting that they do pursue the same argument, or one is a copy of the other. In fact, as I indicated in chapter one, they differ on many things, of which the most important is their understanding of rationality. Arkoun believes it is possible to have an "ideology-free reason" and approach the text accordingly, whereas Esack believes that every "interpreter" carries a baggage of theological (or other types) assumptions, regardless of the space and time one lives in, studies, produces, etc. However, there are commonalities. The two most important links that bind them together are their commitment to "liberty" and the "hermeneutical method" in understanding the texts.[307]

My reason, however, for choosing Esack's work rather than Arkoun's was its originality. As a South African Muslim scholar, speaker and social activist, Esack, unlike Arkoun, is actively involved, both as an observer and a participant, in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. His commitment for justice and liberty, in fact, sometimes put him against his fellow Muslims next to Christians and other strugglers in the South African context. When I considered this against the common classical Muslim stereotyping of others in the context of "unbelievers are one community,"[308] I thought his examination of *kufr* (unbelief) and *mushrik* (polytheist) in the light of hermeneutical principals might offer a valuable and stimulating example.

In his long article "Qur'anic Hermeneutics,"[309] Esack explains that in his usage, in general "hermeneutics" "refers principally to textual interpretation, the recovery of meaning and the problems surrounding this procedure."[310] He is more specifically concerned with

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303 Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 38-39.
304 Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 98.
305 Arkoun, *"The Concept of Authority in Islamic Thought,"* 56.
306 Arkoun, *"The Concept of Authority in Islamic Thought,"* 56.
307 As an extension of this I can add "historicity' as well.
308 This is quoted frequently as a hadith by lay Muslims, but none of the authentic hadith collections contains it.
309 Esack, *"Qur'anic Hermeneutics,"* 118-141.
310 Esack, *"Qur'anic Hermeneutics,"* 122.

"reception hermeneutics" which focuses on the "process of interpretation and the appropriateness of interpretation rather than on the fixed literal text."[311] He is totally committed to the historicity of the Qur'an and argues that, "despite its 'beyondness,'" in order to "become meaningful," the Qur'an has to be located within a "historical moment." "Belief in the supra-historicity of the Qur'an," he continues, "thus does not preclude its role as historical scripture."[312] Drawing on Smith's findings, Esack forcibly concludes that:

> "The Qur'an's claims to be a guide to people who are located within history mean that revelation remains related to history. Muslims, like others, have connected with a reality transcending history and that revelation, putative or real, has taken place within history and has been conditioned by history."[313]

Within this understanding, he approaches the term *kufr* (literally *ingratitude*, commonly *unbelief*) -other forms are the "participial noun *kafir*, and its plural, *kuffar* or *kafirun*"[314]- in the light of 3:21-22:

> "Verily, as for those who reject/are ungrateful [*yakfur*] for the signs of God, and slay the Prophets against all right, and slay people who enjoin justice, announce unto them a grievous chastisement. It is they whose works shall come to nought, both in this world and in the life to come; and they shall have none to succour them."

In his general summary of the verses, Esack remarks that the quotation contains the "apparently doctrinal (*kufr*) with the apparently socio-political (justice)." The verse is a powerful statement against those who do *kufr* and "obstruct justice." It starts with the condemnation of both types of acts, promises the perpetrators severe punishment, threatens them with loss of all work and of "support." Esack criticises classical exegetes for their failure in distinguishing "between *kufr* as an active attitude of individuals (or a collection of individuals) and the socio-religious (and often ethnic) identity of a group."[315] He also observes that in the Qur'anic and Muslim discourse, *kufr* has "become the most pregnant word with all that is despised in the rejected Other,"[316] both in the past and in the present contexts. To exemplify this, he gives two modern usages from the South African example: "*kafir* [with one "f"] as a 'violent symbol of religious exclusion'" and "*kaffir* [with double "ff"] as racist demonising of the Other," the black majority.[317] This proves that, he concludes, "rethinking *kufr* is deeply human and firmly connected to the search for justice."[318]

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311 Esack, *"Qur'anic Hermeneutics,"* 122-123.
312 Esack, *"Qur'anic Hermeneutics,"* 126.
313 Esack, *"Qur'anic Hermeneutics,"* 136. He refers to Smith's views in this paragraph:
> "Not only what we study is historical, however; so, too, is our study of it... The pursuit of truth, too, takes its conditioned place in an historical development. Scripture, whatever else it may additionally be, is also an historical phenomenon. The understanding of scripture that is becoming possible, truer than any that have gone before, is possible because we can now construct it on the basis of a new critical awareness of what has gone before" (Smith, W C, *What Is Scripture?*, London: SCM, 1993, 68).

314 Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 135.
315 Esack, F, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 134.
316 Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 135.
317 Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 135.
318 Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 135.

According to lexicographers, in its original meaning *kufr* meant (i)"to conceal,"[319] which later came to mean (ii) "concealing something with the intention of destroying it;" more commonly though it meant (iii) "concealing an act of grace or kindness, i.e. ingratitude."[320] Then after the term *islam* came to "represent an act of God's grace," *kufr* became (iv) "synonymous with denying it." Thus a "*kafir* came to mean someone who, having 'received God's benevolence, shows no sign of gratitude in his [or her] conduct, or even acts rebelliously against his benefactor.'"[321] Esack's semantic round up is completed with a quotation from Toshihiko Izutsu, who after examining "pre-Islamic literature," concludes that the "'real core... of its semantic structure was not unbelief, but rather ingratitude or unthankfulness.'"[322] Both Esack and Izutsu agree that in the Qur'anic usage, the "secondary meaning" of *kufr* as "unbelief" (opposite of *iman* -faith, belief- and *islam*) overtook the original meaning. However, Esack warns that even if this is the case with *kufr* , it always involves "a conscious attitude and a set of concrete actions," "rather than a casual ignoring or disregard of the existence of God."[323] Another important point he makes is that we should never let the "doctrinal" term totally overshadow the original meaning of *kufr*, since this would mean losing the "most significant semantic element in it."[324]

In its wider meaning as the "rejecter of faith," *kafir* was originally employed to refer to "some Meccans who insulted Muhammad and, later, in Madina, to various elements among the People of the Book as well." In the early formative years of Islam during the reign of the caliphs, it was freely used by several groups to "exclude the internal Other with whom one differed."[325] We finally hear Esack's understanding of *kufr* in the widest sense as it is applied in the Qur'an:

> "The Qur'an portrays *kufr* as an actively and dynamic attitude of ingratitude leading to wilful rejection of known truths, God's gifts, and, flowing from this as well as intrinsically connected to it, a pattern of actively arrogant and oppressive behaviour."[326]

To corroborate this understanding, he brings in the verses cited above in which *kufr* was related to "violent opposition to the prophets of God and a determination to destroy their mission."[327] Among other characteristics of *kufr*, he lists "striving for" it (16:106; 22:51; 34:5), "struggle in the way of evil" (4:76), "refusal to spend one's wealth on the poor" (2:254; 3:179; 9:34, 35; 41:7) "oppress the weak" (4:168; 14:13) and "maintains silence in the face of evil and oppression" (5:79). In this juncture, he introduces one of the most important contributions to the discussion, by which he departs from the traditional

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[319] From this usage, for instance, tillers are called *kuffar* in the sense that they sow the seed and cover it up with soil. In *the Qur'an* 57:20, it is used with this meaning.
[320] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 135. See *the Qur'an* 2:153; 14:7, 15; 26:19; 27:40; 29:66; 30:33 and 39:7.
[321] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 135.
[322] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 135-136 (quoted from Izutsu, T, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966, 26).
[323] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 136.
[324] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 136.
[325] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 137.
[326] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 137.
[327] Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 137.

understanding of the term. It is the distinction between the "violent opposition to God" and the "theological, rational or philosophical problems with the notion of a supreme deity," due to the fact that *kafir* already "freely acknowledge the existence of such a entity" (2:61-63; 31:25; 33:9, 78). The notion of the God the Meccans had, and the God Muhammad introduced, was not very different theologically, except that it challenged the whole structure of the society, especially the status quo of the powerful, with the proposals of "concrete transformations" from "exploitation to justice, from selfishness to selflessness," from "narrow tribalism" to *ummah* (one united community), etc.[328] As Fazlur Rahman cogently expresses, the monotheism Muhammad preached was, "from the very beginning, linked up with a sense of social and economic justice whose intensity is no less than the intensity of the monotheistic idea, so that whoever reads the early Revelations of the Prophet[329] cannot escape the conclusion that the two must be regarded as expressions of the same experience."[330]

At this point, to erase the doubts that he is ignoring the doctrinal relevance of *kufr* , Esack turns his attention to address its relation to dogma in the Qur'anic context. In doing this he raises four points:

Firstly, when there is a link between *kufr* and dogma, it is always made within a "real socio-historical context" and with the conviction that "sincere belief in the unity of God and ultimate accountability to Him would lead to a righteous and just society."[331]

Secondly, it is emphasised in the Qur'an that *kafir* is someone who is "deliberate" in what s/he is doing, which is closely related to its linguistic meaning "covering something" consciously. In this sense, the Qur'anic definition of *kafir* is "someone who has actually recognised the unity of God and Muhammad as His Prophet, but who nevertheless, wilfully refuses to acknowledge it."[332] Other Qur'anic synonyms of *kufr* such as *kidhb* (to lie) and *katm* (to conceal) also support this point (2:42, 159, 174).

Thirdly, it is an "antagonistic attitude to *Islam* and to *Muslims*, in the sense of submission to God and to a people who wanted to organise their collective existence on the basis of such submission, that the Qur'an denounces as *kufr*."[333] He remarks that opposing for instance, contemporary "reified Islam" or "socio-religious community known as Muslims" are entirely different.[334]

The final point is about the "motives of the *kuffar's* decision to refrain from professing belief." According to the Qur'an they knew that Islam was more than uttering certain words or a mental exercise, rather it "required a radical change in personal life, in

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328 Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 138.
329 *The Qur'an* 107:1-7.
330 Rahman, F, *Islam*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979, 12,
331 Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 138-139.
332 Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 139.
333 Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 139.
334 Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 139.

values and in socio-economic relations."[335] They neither accepted nor wanted to do them and thus opted for refusal.

Esack's concluding remarks are very revealing and worth full quotation:

> "According to the Qur'an, it is not labels that are counted by God but actions that are weighed (2:177; 99:7-8). One cannot hold hostage to the ethos of *kufr* which characterised their forebears, those who, by accident of birth, are a part of any group, nor others who subsequently emerge from it; nor can we do this to individuals who existed within that group, but were nonparticipants in *kufr*. Similarly, one cannot attribute the faith commitment and faith of preceding generations of *Muslims* to contemporary Muslims... The fact of group identity should not be allowed to subvert a principle of personal accountability... If individuals are held accountable for deeds that are going to be weighed, then one is left with no alternative but to affirm the dynamic nature of *islam, iman* and *kufr*."[336]

The lines written at the beginning of Kahlil Gibran's collected works by the translator illustrates best what Esack has just stated. Commenting on the notion of *kafir* (unbeliever), the translator states: "if we confine Islam to the outward details, Gibran will be a *kafir* and the translator of this book will be a wrongdoer by rendering it into Arabic... However, if we look at the essence of Islam deeply, not superficially, we will find Gibran in the forefront of Muslims, who strive to spread the eternal truth..."[337]

Without taking into account the historicity of both our texts and their interpretation of them by us, pigeonholing people with static dogmas does justice neither to the dynamic individual, nor to the "ego-transformation" that takes place everyday, nor to the "perpetual transformation" that Esack expresses beautifully: "Individuals are ever-changing entities. Every new encounter with ourselves and others, every deed that we do or refuse to do, is a step in our perpetual transformation."[338] Esack decidedly finishes with personal accountability of individuals and their assessment according to their deeds. This requires a hermeneutic condition that checks the labels (*iman, islam, kufr*, etc.) constantly to nourish their "dynamic nature" against the easy option of freezing them through dogmatic practices.

If one compares Esack's hermeneutical approach to Hick's mythological/metaphorical approach, it does not take long for one to spot the difference. It differs from Hick's in three aspects. Firstly, it does not have the negative connotations that Hick's approach has, e.g. that holy texts are merely human products, which immediately puts off many devout believers even from considering pluralism a possible choice. Second, it proposes a broader reading of the scriptures ("prophetic, legislative, narrative, sapiential and hymnal (poetic)"),[339] which includes Hick's mythical/metaphorical reading, too. Last but not least, it treats holy texts as revelations, not mythological human products which do not relate to

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335 Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 139.
336 Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 144.
337 Gibran, K, *al-Majmu'a al-Kamila* (*Collected Works* -2 vols.), trans. Bashir, al-A A, Beirut: n. p., n.d., 7.
338 Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 144.
339 Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 38.

the Real, which means that the danger of reductionism is not as grave as it is in Hick's.[340] It offers a middle way between on the hand the exclusivist narrow reading of the Qur'an which, from a pluralistic perspective, condemns the majority of the humankind -religious or otherwise- to Hell because they happen to be born into a different environment and are equipped with different filters in their response to the Real and, on the other hand, it avoids the mistake of Hick's mythological approach which reduces sacred texts to human products and expects a critical reading of them. To relate to Hick's approach, one can say that the hermeneutical approach reminds Muslims that there is myth in the Qur'an but, contrary to what Hick claims, not the whole of it. To be able to decide which is which, Muslims have to take hermeneutics more seriously and utilise it for a better understanding of the Qur'an in general and in particular in their relation with other religions.

5.3.6. Postmodern Concerns

With hermeneutics, I completed my essential task of comparing moderate pluralism and Islam, which concludes that pluralism and Islam are compatible. There is, however, one more problem: the postmodern dilemma and its resonance in the Islamic world. As seen in chapter four in Surin's critique of Hick, pluralism, as a by-product of postmodernism, has been severely scrutinised by critics on the grounds that it robes the Other of its otherness, debases and renames them under the label of *pluralism* to be consumed by the global conglomerates of the Western world. In other words, it does not mean respect and tolerance to the Other, but Coca-Colanization and McDonaldization of the Other in disguise. In addition to others (e.g. economical, political, etc.), *religious pluralism* is nothing but another means of operating in the religious field through its relativising philosophy serving to achieve the wider project. I have dealt with Hick's critics in chapter four, but left the Muslim reactions to postmodernism to this chapter because of its relevance here. Thus, since many of the criticisms levelled at Hick's theory can be directed against moderate pluralism, too, before my finishing touches, I seek to address briefly some similar concerns from Islamic perspective.

In the Muslim world, there have been mixed reactions to postmodernism. In *Postmodernism and Islam*,[341] one of the most important and first books from an Islamic perspective, Akbar S Ahmed classifies Muslim responses to postmodernism under three headings according to their attitude to Islam and the West.[342] (1) "Traditionalists" who emphasise the "larger message of Islam, rather than the narrower sectarian or personal

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[340] A good example of this can be found in the attitudes of two Muslim scholars, Nasr and Rahman, who both refuse to review the Qur'anic statements, for instance on Christology and Virgin Birth, in the light of Hick's mythical/metaphorical understanding (Nasr, *"Response to Hans Küng's Paper,"* 100-101 and Rahman, F, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 170). However, with hermeneutics Ayoub provides both a pluralistic and an Islamic answer to seemingly difficult problems between Christianity and Islam. See for more: Ayoub, *"Towards an Islamic Christology,"* 163-188 and *"Towards an Islamic Christology, II,"* 91-121.

[341] Ahmed, A S, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

[342] Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, 29.

squabbles" and believe in the "universal message of God and in inter-faith dialogue"[343] (e.g. Ismail R al-Faruqi, Ali Shariati, S. H Nasr and F Rahman). (2) "Radicals" who are also committed to Islam, but have "lost patience with and rejected traditionalists"[344] and are "usually driven by hatred and contempt for what they call 'the West.'" "They tap the anger and resentment among Muslims."[345] Shabbir Akhtar, Parvez Manzoor, Ziauddin Sardar and Kalim Siddiqui are considered among this group. (3) "Modernists" who believe that "religion as a force, nostrum, or guide is no longer valid in our age" and thus "dropped the past altogether and succumbed to the global civilisation dominated by the West."[346] He includes Salman Rushdie, Tariq Ali, Hamza Alavi and Eqbal Ahmed, whose only connection with Islam is perhaps their name.[347]

Ahmed points out that Muslims writing on postmodernism, who are very few, have tended to take a very negative attitude against it. They "dismiss it as a continuation of Western modernism, as destructive and doomed, equated to 'Americanization,' 'nihilism,' 'anarchy' and 'devastation.'"[348] He believes that the general tone of Muslim responses to postmodernism is "usually incomprehension and anger."[349] Thus postmodernism in a Muslim context means, Ahmed observes:

> "a shift to ethnic or Islamic identity... as against an imported foreign or Western one; a rejection of modernity; the emergence of a young, faceless, discontented leadership; cultural schizophrenia; a sense of entering an apocalyptic moment in history; above all, a numbing awareness of the power of and pervasive nature of the Western media which are perceived as hostile."[350]

Commenting on the negative role the media play in postmodern discourse between Islam and the West, Ahmed argues that it fosters a "shallow, impressionistic and often execratory assessment in the West; in return, it creates a strident radicalisation among Muslims."[351] We have just seen that, according to Ahmed, one of these young radical voices is Sardar. The title of his recent book on postmodernism echoes the scepticism Ahmed has just

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[343] Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, 158.
[344] Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, 159.
[345] Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, 160.
[346] Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, 163.
[347] Ahmed's category might fit into his definition of modernism, but I think it is oversimplified, misleading and does not adequately reflect the diversity of Muslim opinion. He half-heartedly concedes this deficiency and tries to defend it by referring to his departure point, that is whether one has a faithful connection with Islam and how one relates to the West. For instance, he locates Rahman among "traditionalists" just because he values Islam, but the popular opinion places him among the "modernists," which requires a radical revision of the whole taxonomy. It would be more accurate to have four categories to reflect both the diversity of the Muslim scholarship and his project of "postmodernism and Islam" without really altering his definition. Thus this is how I would do it: i. *traditionalists* (e.g. Nasr and al-Faruqi), ii. *radicals* (e.g. Sardar and Siddiqui), iii. *modernists* (e.g. Rahman and Arkoun), and iv. *postmodernists* (e.g. Rushdie and Ali). The reason why I separate traditionalist and modernists is that their opinion about the related issues is too diverse to be classified under the same umbrella.
[348] Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, 28.
[349] Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, 29.
[350] Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, 44.
[351] Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, 154.

described prevalent among some Muslims: *Postmodernism and the Other: The New Imperialism of Western Culture.*[352]

In this book, Sardar identifies six characteristics of postmodernism. Apparently, in his view, five of them are negative and only one is perhaps "positive." Negative ones are: (i) that "all that is valid in modernity is totally invalid and obsolete in postmodern times," such as "Truth, Reason, Morality, God, Tradition and History."[353] (ii) That "there is no ultimate Reality behind things."[354] (iii) That instead of reality, what we have is a "simulacrum: a world in which all distinction between image and material reality has been lost."[355] (iv) That everything is "meaningless." Quoting Umberto Eco from *Foucault's Pendulum*,[356] Sardar states that "the world is nothing, but an onion" to be "deconstructed" "layer by layer," which at the end gives us "a grand void."[357] (v) That "doubt" is the "permanent human condition,"[358] i.e. "no theory, no absolute, no experience: doubt everything."[359] Finally the positive one (vi) comes: that postmodernism "emphasises plurality of ethnicities, cultures, genders, truths, realities, sexualities, even reasons, and argues that no one type should be privileged over others."[360] At least on this positive aspect of pluralism, Ahmed[361] and Sardar can agree. However, Sardar spells out his suspicions about the whole package and contends that "far from being a new theory of liberation, postmodernism, particularly from the perspective of the Other, the non-western cultures,[362] is simply a new wave of domination riding on the crest of colonialism and modernity,"[363] which is identified as the "main thesis" of the book. To substantiate this claim, he argues vehemently that "colonialism," as "physical occupation," "modernity," as intellectual occupation, and "postmodernism," as existential occupation,[364] make three bad bedfellows that constitute an evil-triangle.

Sardar concludes that despite its promising departure as a "legitimate protest against the excesses of suffocating modernity, instrumental rationality and authoritarian

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352 Sardar, Z, *Postmodernism and the Other: New Imperialism of Western Culture*, London: Pluto Press, 1998.
353 Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other*, 8.
354 Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other*, 9. Interestingly enough Sardar's exposition of this principle sounds very Hickian: "We see largely what we want to see, what our position in time and place allows us to see, what our cultural and historic perceptions focus on" (ibid.).
355 Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other*, 10.
356 Eco, U, *Foucault's Pendulum*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1989.
357 Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other*, 10.
358 Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other*, 234. Sardar accurately pinpoints this as the main argument of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (ibid.). In another book, which Sardar is a contributor, Rushdie is quoted from an interview conducted on the day Ayatollah Khomeini's death *fatwa* was issued: "Doubt, it seems to me, is the central condition of a human being in the 20th century. One of the things that has happened to us... is to learn how *certainty* crumbles in [our] hand[s]" (Appignanesi, R et al., *Introducing Postmodernism*, London: Icon Books, 1999, 157).
359 Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other*, 10.
360 Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other*, 10-11.
361 Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, 27.
362 By successively describing "other cultures" as "non-western," which implies the Western as the definitive culture, Sardar seems to be projecting himself subconsciously as a victim of the dominating postmodern thinking or was it a characteristic of modernity?
363 Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other*, 13.
364 Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other*, 13.

traditionalism," postmodernism itself has "become a universal ideology that kills everything that gives meaning and depth to the life of non-western individuals and societies."[365] It declares the end of "grand meta-narratives," but paradoxically postmodernism itself becomes a grand meta-narrative. Seen as a meta-theory about religions, the similar charge may be raised against religious pluralism (in either form) in the sense that it, too, announces the end of religions which claim to hold the "absolute Truth," but this statement itself makes an absolute claim, which can only be made by the Real, nobody can hold the absolute truth -what is called a God's eye view- which may be taken as championing total relativity. As we have seen earlier, Hick's usual answer to this question is that, firstly, his theory never claims to hold the God's eye view of religions and secondly, it has been reached inductively, that is by studying different religions[366] and observing their followers, not from the postmodern doubt that "there is no absolute Truth to be held." Thirdly, contrary to the postmodern claims that "there is no ultimate Reality behind things,"[367] Hick's pluralism believes that there is an Ultimate Reality behind things that can be experienced and expressed differently, as witnessed in the world religions. This is one of the most important differences between postmodernism and Hick's religious pluralism that their epistemological starting point is different. Postmodernism originates from "doubt," whereas pluralism argues for an epistemic distance from the Real, which can nonetheless be known and experienced differently at the phenomenal level. However, by advocating the strong ineffability of the noumenal Real, Hick puts too big a gap between the Real and humankind, which brought about the charge of "transcendental agnosticism" and reduced the sacred knowledge of the Real to "human production." Hence, I have argued instead for a moderate ineffability of the noumenal Real, to reduce that gap and acknowledge the contribution of the Real in the process of our knowledge of the divine, and to give more room to the holy scriptures as a vehicle in this process. Thus moderate pluralism tries to accomplish a balanced understanding of religions by avoiding, on the one side, the predicaments of postmodernism and responding to its threats to religious epistemology and on the other, interacting with its positive aspects, respecting and tolerating diversity in different forms. Consequently, it defends the cognitivity of the religions (that there is a Real behind all things) against postmodernist "doubt" and acknowledges the diversity of religions as effective ways of salvation/liberation.

Towards the end of his book, Sardar examines postmodern attitudes to *religion*, labels them as worthless and confirms his belief that they transfer "western imperialism into a new phase where uncontrolled and self-glorified lust and all-encompassing consumption,

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[365] Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other*, 13-14.

[366] The contribution of "cognitive" historians, such as Eliade, is worth noting here: "that the unity of everything mental must necessarily lie in the unity of the human mind" (Eliade, and Couliano, *The Eliade Guide to World Religions*, 1).

[367] Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other*, 9. Interestingly enough Sardar's exposition of this principle sounds very Hickian: "We see largely what we want to see, what our position in time and place allows us to see, what our cultural and historic perceptions focus on" (ibid.).

including the consumption of the Other, become the norm."[368] He quotes David Griffin and John Milbank, but concentrates his attacks on Don Cupitt's non-realist understanding of religion as "love." Sardar does not seem to be aware either of western pluralists such as Hick and Smith, or Muslim pluralists such as Ayoub[369] and Arkoun. How Sardar would react to moderate pluralism is difficult to prejudge, but I assume it would be a mixture of ambiguity and suspicion. As we shall see in his call for moving to tradition as a response to postmodernism, ambiguity and rejection (or "incomprehension and anger"[370] as Ahmed puts it) is a predominant character of Sardar's thought.

In the last chapter, Sardar finally offers his solution: that is, to be able to survive postmodernism, we should all move "forward to tradition." "Cultural resistance to postmodernism," he continues, "begins with tradition, as did opposition to modernity."[371] But what does he mean by "tradition"? He warns that "traditions of resistance" that do not "go forward" are in the brink of "being a dead weight." He calls for a distinction between "tradition and traditionalism." He argues for a *tradition* that moves forward, which he defines as:

> "the summation of the absolute frame of reference provided by the values and axioms of a civilisation that remain enduringly relevant and the conventions that have been developed in history into its own distinctive 'gaze': patterns of organisation, ideas, lifeways, techniques and products."[372]

He believes that it can be "periodised" and "studied as work of human history wherein there has been change" and "*most* significantly tradition *is*."[373] Traditionalism is, on the other hand, "passive," "fixed in specific space-time co-ordinates," "oppressive and backward-looking," "as personified by fundamentalist movements."[374]

The charges Sardar has just made against postmodernism and have been raised by others against pluralism can be applicable to Sardar's own forward moving or living "tradition." Sardar does not explicate the epistemic, social, and political position of the "tradition" that he longs to revive and preserve. Will it be (i) Islam as a "meta-narrative" and others are also tolerated, or (ii) is he arguing for a pluralism similar to moderate pluralism, or worse (iii) is it a total relativity of all traditions, living in peaceful co-existence? He cannot probably seek to advocate (i) and (iii) since they, one way or the other, lead to the postmodern condition that he relentlessly despises. That is, either the consumption of the Other within a dominant culture, or total anarchy of relativism where fiction and reality cannot be differentiated. We cannot be sure about (ii) either, since he does not say anything about it, but I suspect his oversensitivity towards and overprotection

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[368] Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other*, 271.
[369] There is only one passing reference to Ayoub's article on the issue of human rights (Ayoub, M M, "*Asian Spirituality and Human Rights,*" Encounters 2, no. 1, 1996, 32-42).
[370] Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, 29.
[371] Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other*, 273.
[372] Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other*, 273.
[373] Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other*, 273.
[374] Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other*, 274.

of "tradition" and general suspicion of anything Western might bar him from doing so. He, for instance, expresses his strong desire on another occasion to have a truly "pluralistic society." Thus he cautions us against the cynical postmodernist agenda of elimination and acculturation of the Other, which makes it impossible to have a truly pluralistic society, for there will be no one with whom to have a dialogue.[375] But he does not discuss what he means by a "pluralistic society," what it means to be a "pluralist," what the relation of the Muslims should be towards other religions in such a society and how traditions relate to each other in a pluralistic society.

Two further points are also notable in Sardar's evaluation and the rejection of the West and postmodernism. Ahmed, as a social anthropologist, notes that one of the general characteristics shared by the three groups is that almost "all are permanently based in the West. By definition, immigration creates insecurity and neurosis."[376] My first point is that if Sardar were to live in his native country or in any of the Islamic countries, despite his insistence on "tradition," he would be branded as a "modernist" and be in serious trouble for breaching certain holy or otherwise laws. The very Western postmodern system that he criticises gives him the right to speech, write and campaign, if necessary, but the system he wants to revive does not. I am not arguing that the Western systems are the best, but to look at the appalling human rights[377] records of any of the Islamic countries to prove the point that they are worse. As Ahmed put it bluntly, the "brutality of despotic Muslim leaders" show *mercy* (which is one of the most cited names of Allah in the Qur'an) to neither their own citizens, nor to any other believer.[378] It is ironic that many of these leaders thrive on the arguments based on tradition that Sardar put forward. The second is related to that, precisely because he lives in a country that is foreign to his own culture, his suggestions are romantic, utopian and out of touch with reality. He does not go into details, for instance, which of the Islamic institutions are considered to be within the boundaries of "traditionalism" and which are in "tradition," which are "human products" that can be "periodised" and "studied" and which are not.

I strongly believe that Sardar is right in pointing out many of the dangers of postmodernism, such as losing cultural diversity, the dangers of globalization and multinational companies, but I think his solution of a *retreat to tradition* is unworkable. Islam is "essentially the religion of equilibrium and tolerance; suggesting and encouraging breadth of vision, global positions and the fulfilment of human destiny in the universe."[379] His total rejection of anything and everything western puts him in "danger of rejecting features central to Islam -such as love of knowledge, egalitarianism, tolerance- because

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375 Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other*, 279.
376 Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, 168.
377 Certainly, Sardar might object to the Human Rights Convention in the first place as another imperialist Western project, but what matters is the contents, not who initiated it. As far as I can see, basic human rights are guaranteed in Islam, too.
378 Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, 36.
379 Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, 48.

they are visibly associated with the West."[380] The other danger is to "reject the universalism of human nature," which is the "main topos in the Qur'an." Commenting on this Ahmed writes:

> "In locating anti-Islamic animosity firmly in the West they [radicals] also implicitly reject the universalism of human nature. But Allah is everywhere... God's purview and compassion take in everyone, 'all creatures.' The world is not divided into an East and a West: 'To Allah belong the East and the West: whithersoever ye turn, there is Allah's countenance' (Surah 2:115)... God cannot be parochial or xenophobic."[381]

Postmodernism, like any other school of thought, has its weaknesses and strengths, because no theory is perfect. It does not make it any better or worse, just because it happened to be developed mainly in the Western countries. What matters is the general Muslim principle of considering wisdom as a "lost property of Muslims" and the command of "seeking knowledge even if it is in China [i.e. wherever it is]." I believe the same is true of moderate pluralism, which constitutes a middle-way by avoiding the perils of postmodernism (e.g. meaninglessness, doubt, acculturation and globalization) and utilising its promises (diversity, respect and tolerance). This probably suffices for the purpose of this dissertation, which also brings an end to my comparison of moderate pluralism and Islam.

5.4. Partial Conclusions

In this chapter, I presented a modified version of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis and applied it to an Islamic milieu to see possible problems and offered solutions to them from an Islamic perspective.

In my modification of Hick's theory, I focused my attention on three points: i) I argued that a "moderate ineffability," instead of total ineffability, of the noumenal Real might be the solution for Hick's problems, ii) I called for a "hermeneutical approach" against his reductionist mythical/metaphorical approach to religious language, and iii) I asserted that the scope of his soteriological criterion needs to be widened by the Dan Cohn-Sherbok's "viability principle" to acknowledge the ritual aspect of religions. In the Islamic context, I addressed five primary concerns. Firstly, I examined the ways of reconciling the strict monotheistic faith of Islam in one God and the validity of the different religions argued by moderate pluralism. "The principle of plurality," as attested by the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions, led to the solution here. Next I dealt with the verses carrying an apparently exclusivistic and pluralistic tendencies. In this matter two different understandings of *islam* (Islam and submission of oneself to the Real) has made important contributions. This brought us to the finality of Islam as the only salvific way, the prophethood of Muhammad and the question of salvation. The third important point was the "freedom of religion" and law of apostasy as understood and applied to the Other

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[380] Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, 48.
[381] Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, 48-49.

(especially the people of the Book). It became clear in this context that Muslims' recognition of other religions usually remained within the boundaries of socio-politics, but never reached to the theological level. This must be reconsidered in the light of the authentic evidence, if a more positive relation is to be sought with other religions and those who do not make religious choices on the basis of moderate pluralism. Fourthly, I demonstrated the workability of a hermeneutical understanding of the Qur'an in the example of *kufr* (unbelief). Finally, in this chapter, I considered the postmodern concerns from an Islamic perspective. With the collapse of confidence in the Enlightenment reason and the project of modernity, there is a tendency among some Muslims to reject everything that is somehow related to the West, regardless of whether Islam embraces it or not. The hastened overreaction to postmodernism carries signs of this prejudice. However, it evinced that the positive aspects of postmodernism have been practised in Islam for centuries and need to be reclaimed through careful study. In this sense, the answer, I believe, lies not in retreat to tradition (i.e. particularism in any form -inclusivism or exclusivism) but in developing a more positive, tolerant and pluralistic attitude. I trust that moderate pluralism can provide a highly plausible option in this context. But why moderate pluralism, not Hick's version of it? I tried to answer this question on several occasions throughout the chapter. But the cogency of Islamic discussion necessitated keeping it as an intra-Islamic discourse at points. Therefore, as indicated earlier, I wish to amplify once more why a moderate pluralism is more suited to an Islamic context rather than Hick's version.

I stated at the beginning of my dissertation that this will be an examination of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis from an Islamic perspective to test its viability for appropriation within an Islamic context. After careful consideration, I concluded that Hick's theory is not suitable for an Islamic context for three main reasons: its assertion of the strong ineffability of the Real, its mythical approach to religious language, and the scope of soteriological criterion, of which the first two are closely linked. What are the obstacles, then, that these three pose against a dialogue between Hick's hypothesis and Islam? I consider them in turn and offer my solutions to them.

Strong ineffability of the Real puts an almost unbridgeable barrier between an Islamic discourse and Hick's pluralism. First and foremost, Hick's totally ineffable Real contradicts the notion of Allah/God in Islam, to which Hick usually appeals by one of His ninety nine names: as *al-Haqq*, the Real. Hick's Real lies beyond the scope of human language, but in Islam Allah is not. He makes himself known through different means, of which revelation is the most important. Even though we cannot know His essence, we can know certain aspects of Him, such as that He is good, the cause, the creator and the sustainer of all, none of which can be applicable to Hick's Real. If Hick's theory cannot even make room for the notion of Allah as He is understood in Islam, this blocks the way to dialogue right from the start. Hick then faces the postmodernist charge of localising the gods of respected world religions.

Strong ineffability, furthermore, has very serious bearings on the Qur'an. I said earlier that the Qur'an holds a position in Islam similar to Jesus' in Christianity. Thus any argument directly affecting this position will bring strong resistance from Muslims towards any pluralist dialogue. By denying any applicability of religious language to the noumenal Real, Hick's strong ineffability poses a double jeopardy to the Qur'an. First, it cuts off any link the Qur'an might have with the Real, and second, it reduces it to Muhammad's expression of his religious experience rather than a revelation from God/the Real. This treatment of the Holy scriptures will preclude not only Muslims but also other religions from accepting Hick's hypothesis. We have seen examples of this from Nasr and other Muslim scholars.

Thus I suggested that the link between the Real, the notion of God in Islam and the Qur'an must be re-established, if pluralism seeks to have any conversation with Islam and be a theory that respects the Holy scriptures of the world religions as they uphold it. My solution was to adopt instead the common notion of *moderate ineffability*, with which Hick starts. It will first accord to and save the notion of God as believed in Islam. That is to say, since Muslims have always been aware of the fact that the Qur'anic language does not relate to the Real as it is in itself, it is possible to have a common ground that pluralism needs, that is the moderately ineffable Real. The rest will follow easily for we can say that the Qur'an is a revelation that relates to the Real, not the product of Muhammad. This, I believe, is acceptable for Muslims and can open the doors for dialogue between moderate pluralism and Islam. This, as far as I can see, is where the crux of the matter lies. Then comes the hermeneutical space to deal with the Qur'anic data that suggest a particularistic tone.

Hick's theory opens a double wound for any Muslim to approach it as a possible way of understanding religious diversity. As if the humiliation of accepting that the Qur'an is the mere product of Muhammad and that it does not relate to God in any sense was not enough, a Muslim must also concede that it is a myth, one among many; worse is that it is a myth which should be handled critically. Any Muslim will regard the description of the Qur'an as myth offensive, which is very bad news for a theory whose main slogan is respect and tolerance to all. Hick's efforts to give a positive twist to the notion of myth -such as that it directs us to the Real and produces saintly fruits- will prove to be fruitless in terms of establishing a positive link between the followers of any religion.

The hermeneutical approach I advocate in moderate pluralism bears none of the negative connotations of Hick's mythical/metaphorical approach. It offers a wider reading of the texts, such as legal, narrative and hymnal, which includes Hick's mythical/metaphorical reading, too. It may positively encourage Muslims to identify and evaluate carefully the different discourses that exist in the Qur'an. I believe this will be acceptable to many Muslims and applicable to the Qur'an, as I demonstrated with ample examples in the preceding discussions and particularly in Esack's work.

I do not have much quarrel with Hick's soteriological criterion, since we agree on the basic principle that the ultimate aim of religions is to transfer human beings from "self-centredness to Reality-centredness." However, I suggested that in order to avoid reducing religion to moral heroism, moderate pluralism should put emphasis also on the transforming impact of the ritual aspect of religion, which has paramount importance in any religion, particularly in Islam.

I conclude, then, that moderate pluralism is compatible with Islam and in the long run will encourage Muslims to develop a more positive approach to deal with religious diversity. Conversely, Hick's theory as it stands is neither compatible with Islam, nor likely to encourage Muslims to adopt it as a way of understanding other religions, because of the fatal blows it carries against the central tenets of Islam, such as the notion of Allah/God, the Qur'an and revelation. I also believe that, contrary to the common misperception among Muslim communities, pluralism, not particularism in any form, is the general character of Islam. Consequently, moderate pluralism might offer better solutions to the problem of religious diversity in our effort for peaceful co-existence and for improvement in mutual self-understanding. It will also, at the global level, increase the chances of genuine dialogue between the world religions, which in turn contribute positively and actively to the world peace.

6. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The ever changing contemporary situation of our world makes religious pluralism a more urgent problem to deal with for the scholars, especially of Christianity and Islam. For the past three decades, Hick's contribution, from a pluralistic perspective, to the discussion of religious diversity has been monumental. As a Muslim, I have always felt the seriousness of the problem of religious diversity, primarily existentially and then intellectually. When I first discovered Hick's pluralistic hypothesis during my MA studies, it sounded very different, appealing and convincing at first sight. His assertion is that "various religions are equally effective ways of attaining salvation/liberation," which is what I call *the pluralistic option*. This was completely a new discovery for me, compared to the Islamic explanations I had known within the orthodox domain. Therefore, I have decided to study it from an Islamic perspective to test its viability for an Islamic context, which probably meant the beginning of embarking on a life-long intellectual quest.

6.1. An Overall Synopsis of Discussions

In chapter one, I have examined three Muslim scholars' views of other religions by applying Race's three-fold taxonomy (exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism), which is, to my knowledge, the first attempt to classify Muslim responses to other religions. For exclusivism, I studied the classical scholar al-Maturidi's thoughts. His main discussion of other religions centred around (i) the criticism of Christianity and Judaism, and (ii) his desire to prove the superiority of Islam as the final way for salvation over other religions. In the end, it became apparent that, according to his argument, everybody has to convert to Islam in order to attain salvation. This did not help at all to resolve my life-long dilemma of "why a compassionate and merciful Allah leaves so many good religionists outside the scheme of salvation just because they happened to be brought up in a different religious climate."

I then focused on the inclusivist views of Ateş, who made a good start by concentrating on the pluralistic verses in the Qur'an that imply salvation outside Islam. However, his commitment to the orthodox understanding of *tawhid*, faith in one God, put him in a position of excluding the majority of Christians and Jews, and refusing even to discuss the cases of non-theistic religions vis-a-vis salvation. Consequently, despite his firm belief in the possibility of salvation outside Islam, he ended up defending a very narrow understanding of inclusivism, that is, salvation for strict monotheists only. Thus we are left once more with the question of "why should a just and loving God abandon many devout believers either in partial darkness or place them in a disadvantaged position as far as salvation/liberation is concerned because of geographical differences which they have no hand in?"

For the pluralist paradigm, Arkoun's thought seemed the best option, since he and Hick met years ago, worked together and knew each other as fellow pluralists. Yet, it made it more interesting, for neither refers to the other's work. Arkoun and Hick's thought converge on the pluralistic option that "different religions are equally valid ways of

attaining salvation/liberation." But Arkoun's pluralism is incomplete and immature, and, as a result, leaves out many of the crucial issues, such as different conceptions of the Ultimate, conflicting-truth claims of religions and the criterion for salvation. His strong advocacy of secularism as the ultimate political system, his total reduction of Islam to morality and spirituality and his relativism is too radical to be accepted by the followers of any religion, let alone Muslims. Above all, there are more important questions related to his methodology: on the one hand historicism is the only criterion to judge everything, but on the other he seems to be implying he is ahistorical; his total rejection of previous Islamic scholarship as biased seems to miss the important point that there is no such thing as unbiased "reason." In this context, even though he is aware of postmodern writers, it is hardly possible to understand his advocacy of Enlightenment reason as the knower of all truth, or "critical reason" as he puts it. Hence his solid belief in the ideology-free "knowledge" as the ultimate authority is a serious mistake. In conclusion, apart from certain aspects of his hermeneutic, I maintain that, at this stage, Arkoun's pluralistic project is immature, too radical to be accepted by Muslims, and eventually doomed to be a failure. With Arkoun's pluralism, our survey of Islamic scholars within the boundaries of Race's threefold typology was completed and the scene for Hick's pluralistic hypothesis was set up.

Chapter two, provided us, firstly, with the basic elements of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis ahead of its full discussion and, secondly, how he evaluated naturalistic and particularistic explanations of religious diversity. Since Hick holds that the universe is religiously ambiguous, i.e. could be interpreted both religiously and naturalistically, and the evidence for and against the existence of an Ultimate Reality cannot be conclusively proved, he appeals to religious experience and tries to construct a new epistemology of religious experience. In order to do this, we followed how he borrowed several theories from various philosophers, such as Wittgenstein's "seeing-as," Swinburne's "principle of credulity," and Pascal's "wager." He extended "seeing-as" to "experiencing-as" to justify the rationality of believing in and being conscious of the presence of an Ultimate Reality. Put in James's famous phrase, this was called the "right to believe." Hick inferred that religious experience was cognitive, i.e. real as the believers take it to be, and not total delusion.

"Experiencing-as" meant that we had different experiences of the same Reality, depending on our mind sets or cognitive filters, and the epistemological golden rule required us to treat others' experience in the same way as we do ours. Hence we have different sets of religious experiences stemming from different religions. But what is a religion? How can one define it? Hick claimed that it can best be described, not defined, and that Wittgenstein's "family resemblance theory" could be a fitting model to approach religions. According to the theory, Hick maintained that there cannot be a single essence of religion, but there can be several overlapping features of which some religions may have some and others may have some others. In this context, he took "the belief in the transcendent" as the main feature of the great world religions that he focused on in his

study. They are five post-axial religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Then came the question of how to account for the plurality of religions.

Hick first examined two (Freudian and Durkheimian) of the common naturalistic explanations of religious plurality. He thought that their explanations of religion as "total delusion" were unsatisfactory. Then he evaluated the particularistic Christian understandings, i.e. exclusivism and inclusivism. He dismissed them as unsuccessful on the grounds similar to what I said about Muslim particularistic approaches, that a loving compassionate Divine Reality will not deprive the majority of humankind of salvation on the basis of either geographical luck or of the accident of birth. He then pressed on with his argument that a new "religious interpretation of religion" was needed, that which avoids the shortcomings of both the naturalistic and particularistic accounts. It must, on the one hand, acknowledge religions as cognitive realities on the basis of the right to believe -contrary to the naturalistic accounts- and, on the other, respect their veridicality on the basis of the epistemological Golden Rule, without branding them either totally or partially false, except one's own, in contrast to the confessional -particularistic- accounts. This, he asserted, can only be attained in his pluralistic account of religions.

In chapter three, I gave an outline development of Hick's pluralistic approach to religions, going back as early as the 1970s. With a "Christian theology of religions," he initially attempted to locate the place of Christ/Christianity among other religions and proposed a "Copernican revolution in theology," according to which he put "God" at the centre of the universe of faiths instead of Christianity, which became *a* , not *the*, way of salvation among many options. The biggest hurdle he encountered in doing so was the Incarnation. Therefore, he had to propose a different understanding of the doctrine. To be able to do this epistemologically, he appealed to the "world religions" to endorse the idea that Jesus's divinity was not unique, for it was natural for the followers of a religion to revere their founder through incarnational language. Philosophically, he showed the difficulties associated with understanding the incarnation as a theological theory and advocated, instead, that it should be interpreted metaphorically; because it was not a theory but a myth. As the third resort, he also appealed to modern biblical studies, which cast doubt over the authenticity of the incarnational verses.

It was not long before Hick's controversial, and to some offensive, ideas had been attacked from several quarters. As a result, Hick had been busy developing and refining his hypothesis throughout the 1980s, which culminated in 1989 with the publication of *An Interpretation of Religion.* As his *magnum opus*, the book contains Hick's mature thoughts on the issue, which he now re-named as "a philosophy of religions," a further step from a "theology of religions." It was transferred from locating Christianity's place within the universe of faiths to understanding the relation between religions and their ultimate ground. One of the major developments was Hick's adoption of the Kantian distinction of noumenon and phenomenon to religious epistemology in an effort to respond to the charges of "theocentricism." This resulted in a number of changes: i. God is substituted with the totally ineffable *noumenal* Real (the Real *an sich*) as the ground of all religious experience;

ii. religions are considered to be phenomenal manifestations of the Real in the *categories* of different gods and absolutes which are *schematised* either as personal or impersonal; iii. they are equally effective ways of salvation/liberation (this hybrid term is also newly coined to embrace theistic as well as nontheistic ways of salvation); iv. religious language is no longer applicable to the noumenal Real, since it is beyond the scope of human language and conception; v. it should thus be construed as mythical and metaphorical; vi. the pragmatic soteriological criterion is introduced as "human transformation from self-centredness to Reality-centredness," which can be detected in the daily lives of human beings with its fruits, such as striving for justice, equality, the betterment of humankind, etc. *Saintliness*, extant in different forms within the great world religions, is taken as an indication of the viability of this criterion.

Yet, Hick's refined pluralistic hypothesis, too, has been widely criticised, mainly by Christians, to which I turned in chapter four. Of all the charges brought up against the hypothesis, I concentrated on four crucial points: theological arrogance, reductionism, the problems associated with the Real, and the problem of criterion.

Since Hick's theory claims to have the most comprehensive explanation of the religious phenomenon, the charge of theological arrogance is frequently brought up against it. Because, critics argue, without holding a privileged position to observe religions, no one is able to make such a contention except God. Hick's response is that he never asserts to have a God's eye view of religions, but rather maintains that his theory is inductively reached. That is to say, he begins with analysing the data produced by the history of religions with a conviction that religious experience is not total delusion. But, that is not all. Hick employs other epistemological principles in his analysis (e.g. the criterion of saintliness and the cosmic optimism of world religions), that involve a selective attitude to the material in hand. In other words, he first epistemologically establishes that "love and compassion" are the right responses to the Real, then tries to verify it with saintly data in religions. Without the backing of these epistemological principles, Hick's pluralism would not have been an inductive hypothesis. Thus, I believe, the charge is sustained. Nevertheless, I reckon that the same applies to any other hypothesis, religious or non-religious. Therefore, it does not put pluralism in a worse position than others. One problem still remains unresolved though: that if the Real is totally unknowable, how can Hick know that "love and compassion" are the right responses to it? This was the most important charge levelled against Hick's postulated Real, which I considered following reductionism.

Reductionism on different levels constituted another serious objection I had to Hick's pluralism: that it reduces religion to morality (which relates to the last point, the soteriological criterion) and holy texts to human products; that its perception contradicts the self-perceptions of the religions; and that the mythical/metaphorical understanding of holy texts is incomplete. None of these points has been sufficiently answered by Hick. Therefore I proposed one of the three modifications I introduced into Hick's pluralism: a hermeneutical approach to the holy texts that treats them as revelations, makes a connection

between the Real and religions, and offers a wider reading of them in addition to Hick's reading. Yet, all these were closely linked with the ineffability of the noumenal Real.

As has been indicated earlier, the postulation of the noumenal Real posed one of the most difficult problems for Hick's theory. My main concern with the noumenal Real was its total ineffability. Although Hick starts with the notion of moderate ineffability common to the great world religions, he ultimately argues for the strong ineffability of the Real, to which human concepts and language do not apply. It involves four fatal problems that ultimately threatens the whole project. Firstly, it makes the Real redundant (that ultimately we can have religious experiences whether it exists or not). Secondly, the theory cannot successfully defend the cognitivity of religions, since it cannot establish the Real as the ground of all religious experience. Thirdly, it reduces revelations to human products, which generates the fourth problem by creating an apathy among believers towards pluralism and a deadlock in interreligious dialogue. To resolve the difficulty that pluralism faced, I have argued, along the lines of Ward and Byrne, for the *moderate ineffability* of the noumenal Real. This will, in the first place, salvage pluralism as a coherent hypothesis; secondly, defend religious cognitivity; and thirdly, respect revelations as revelations, not merely human products. Moderate ineffability holds that the noumenal Real is in essence beyond human conception and language, but we can know certain aspects of it (such as goodness, the cause of all, all powerful, etc.). Thus religious language relates to it at a minimum level. For if the Real plays an active role in the formation of revelation as it makes certain aspects of itself known to us, we cannot say that revelations are human products.

Another point of discussion worth noting in relation to the Real was the relevance of the Kantian distinction. In contrast to Rose's claim, I contended that the Kantian distinction was still relevant, since the Real is always unknowable in its essence and lies beyond the scope of human understanding. I argued that the distinction might also help to boost religious tolerance among believers and non-believers alike by reminding them that nobody is capable of holding the absolute truth.

As the last point of chapter four, I studied the charges regarding Hick's criterion of "salvation/liberation" as human transformation from "self-centredness to Reality-centredness." I affirmed that the criterion rightly spotted the ultimate aim of religions as "recentring one-self in the Real," but neglected the ritual aspect of religion (hence the charge of ethicism). Thus, as the third modification, I concluded that the scope of Hick's soteriological criterion has to be widened. This meant that, as it stood, Hick's theory could not be applied to Islam and had to be modified in three aspects.

Chapter five formed the crescendo of my arguments by reconstituting Hick's hypothesis, applying it to an Islamic context, identifying possible problems and offering solutions to them. I started with a brief summary of points where I thought no change was necessary. These included the "right to believe" (i.e. the rationality of religious belief), the effect of environment on us in the formation of religious experience and identity (different conceptions of the Real and the accident of birth in one's choice of religion), the evaluation

of religions by their salvific effectiveness, and the usefulness of Kantian distinction (the noumenal and the phenomenal Real). Then I moved on to the three points where I considered certain modifications necessary: (i) I argued that a "moderate," instead of "total," ineffability of the noumenal Real might rescue the pluralistic hypothesis, (ii) I called for a "hermeneutical approach" against Hick's reductionist mythical/metaphorical approach in dealing with holy texts, and (iii) I asserted that the scope of the soteriological criterion needed to be widened by the Dan Cohn-Sherbok's "viability principle" to acknowledge the ritual aspect of religions. I called this modified version of Hick's pluralism *moderate pluralism*, which I then applied to an Islamic milieu in order to test its viability.

In the Islamic context, I addressed five primary concerns. Firstly, I examined the possibilities of reconciling the strict monotheistic faith of Islam in one God (namely, *tawhid*) and accepting different religions (theistic and nontheistic) as effective ways of salvation/liberation, as argued by moderate pluralism. The solution here was led by "the principle of plurality," as attested by the Qur'an, and explained and applied by the Prophetic traditions. My next problem was how to understand the Qur'anic evidence that suggested apparently contradictory solutions to religious diversity: on the one side, the exclusivistic verses declaring Islam as the only way for salvation and on the other, pluralistic verses promising salvation for the followers of other religions. In this dilemma, two different but complementary understandings of *islam* (Islam as the institutionalised religion and as submission oneself to the Real) were offered as a breakthrough in understanding exclusivistic verses. This understanding had to be bolstered by the Prophetic traditions, which offered several examples of dealings with other religions as salvific paths besides Islam. If these findings were true, how did they relate to the "freedom of religion" and law of apostasy as understood and applied to the Other (especially *ahl al-Kitab*, the people of the Book) inhabitants of Islamic communities? This was my third problem to resolve in regard to an Islamic context and its relation to moderate pluralism. It became clear, at this juncture, that Muslims' recognition of other religions usually remained within the boundaries of socio-politics and never reached to the theological level. The law of apostasy, which was applied to anybody converting from Islam to any other religion, as death or exile, was the most convincing evidence of this double-standard on Muslims' part. This must be reconsidered, I argued, in the light of the authentic pluralistic evidence, if Muslims seek to have a more positive relation with other religions and those who do not make religious choices on the basis of moderate pluralism. Fourthly, I demonstrated the workability of a hermeneutical approach to holy texts, as argued for in moderate pluralism, with an example from Esack on the Qur'anic term of *kufr* (unbelief). Lastly, I addressed postmodern concerns from an Islamic perspective. Among some Muslims, there is a growing tendency of retreating to particularistic enclaves, for they see the advocacy in postmodernism of tolerance, respect, equal treatment of others, etc. as another hidden agenda of the colonialist West in disguise. I argued that the so-called positive aspects of postmodernism belonged to, and were applied fully or partially by Islam since its birth to the adherents of other religions. Consequently, as the believers of a religion whose intrinsic

nature is pluralistic, Muslims must revive their pluralistic heritage, not the narrow understandings of particularism, or tradition as some put it. Moderate pluralism, I concluded might offer a plausible framework for Muslims in their effort to develop a more pluralistic attitude towards other religions.

6.2. Contributions

I believe our study has made several important contributions to the study of religions and the philosophy of religion. I may perhaps start with the most important one: that a moderate pluralism is more suited to Islam than Hick's.

The main object of this dissertation was to test the viability of Hick's thesis from within an Islamic context. Having examined Hick's pluralistic hypothesis in detail, I detected several problems with it and concluded that unless they were overcome, the pluralistic hypothesis could not be applicable to an Islamic environment. The problems were the strong ineffability of the noumenal Real, the mythical approach to the revealed texts, and the scope of the soteriological criterion.

1. I suggested that the strong ineffability of the Real contradicted, in the first place, the notion of God in Islam and in the second, had very serious repercussions on the Qur'an. Moderate ineffability of the Transcendent, as Hick also concedes, is common to the great world religions, that we can know certain aspects of it (being good, all powerful, sustainer of the universe, etc.), but in its essence it remains beyond the domain of human language and conception. This is the case with Islam's Allah, too. But Hick's totally ineffable Real lies entirely beyond human language and nothing can be said about it (not even good or bad, one or many, etc.), except the formal qualities, such that it exists. As far as Muslims are concerned, this understanding of the Real is nothing but a logical postulate and is quite different from the description of Allah in the Qur'an. If any theory cannot substantiate the notion of an Ultimate in any religion, I believe, the doors for dialogue are closed right from the beginning.

Secondly, strong ineffability does not acknowledge the contribution of the Real in the revelatory process and reduces holy books to human products. The Qur'an effectively becomes Muhammad's expression of his religious experience rather than a revelation from God. The reduction of Qur'an from a holy text to human production will immediately put Muslims off from Hick's pluralism as a possible framework for understanding other religions and developing better relations with them.

My suggestion to the problem, from an Islamic perspective, was to reintroduce the notion of "moderate ineffability of the Real" to restore the link between the noumenal Real, different concepts of the Divine and the revelatory process. This will not only make room for the Muslim notion of Allah but also reinstate the Qur'an's position as revelation. Bolstered with other changes, I called this modified version of Hick's hypothesis "moderate pluralism," because of the paramount importance of moderate ineffability both to pluralism and Islam. Chapter five has shown the compatibility of moderate pluralism with Islam in several aspects.

2. The wider reading of the holy texts offered by a hermeneutical approach against Hick's mythical understanding was another contribution to the discussion from an Islamic perspective. Certainly, when we accept the active role of the Real in revelations, we have the momentous task of how to understand them. Hick tried to reduce the greatness of the task by regarding them as "useful myths," i.e. directing us towards the Real. However, this proved to be another major obstacle between Hick's pluralism and Islam, since it was reductionist, offensive and had a narrow scope in its reading of the holy texts. I argued for a "hermeneutical approach" avoiding both the negativity of Hick's method and the particularist reading of orthodox Muslims. It respects the Qur'an as revelation, while accepting that it contains several discourses in it, of which myth is one of them, but not the whole. I believe I have given enough examples, particularly in the last chapter, to illustrate this assertion.

3. I proposed that the soteriological criterion must put more emphasis on the ritual aspect of religion and recognise clearly its contribution to the process of salvation/liberation. Although Hick's pluralism is right in essence by identifying salvation/liberation as human transformation from "self-centredness to Reality-centredness," it does not accentuate the importance of rituals clearly, which brings about the charge of ethicism. The emphasis on rituals will respond to this charge and also probably boost a more positive Muslim understanding of new religious movements on the basis of Cohn-Sherbok's "viability principle."

4. The dissertation has also shown that, despite some suggestions of its redundancy, the Kantian distinction of noumenal and phenomenal Real was still needed within a moderate pluralism. In Islam, moderate ineffability and the principle of plurality endorse the distinction, that there is a Transcendent reality that makes itself known to us with certain qualities through different means and is experienced differently in the great world religions. The distinction will serve a useful purpose to remind believers that nobody holds the ultimate way of salvation, which in turn will increase dialogue and co-operation between religions.

5. It became clear that the commonly cited examples in Islamic pluralistic writing about the tolerance of Islamic communities to other religions were misleading. Even though they correlated to the issue of pluralism at the basic level of peaceful coexistence, they did not address the real issue of salvation/liberation. Coexistence with the adherents of other religions did not mean recognising their ways as salvifically effective. Aslan, and many others writing on pluralism and Islam, seem to miss this crucial point. I contended that Muslim recognition of other religions has always been limited to the socio-political level alone and never extended to the theological. The widening of scope of apostasy law to include all religions except Islam bore witness to this claim. I called for a return to the original message of the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions to admit other religions as salvific ways of salvation/liberation and asserted that moderate pluralism might offer a highly plausible framework for accomplishing this task.

6. We have demonstrated, for the first time from a Muslim perspective, that Race's three-fold typology (exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism) can be successfully applied to Islam in order to classify and evaluate Muslim understanding of other religions.

7. I hold that moderate pluralism offers a middle way between the perils of particularist attitudes, the doubts of the postmodernist condition, and the reductionism of Hick's pluralism. It argues for accepting religions as equally effective ways of salvation/liberation against particularism, secures the foundation of noumenal Real against the doubts of postmodernism, and respects religious traditions as they are against Hick's reductionist pluralism.

8. Lastly, in an Islamic context, it is my opinion that moderate pluralism is compatible with Islam and can provide Muslims with a helpful general framework both for their discovery of the pluralistic aspects of Islam and for developing a more positive and tolerant attitude towards other religions. Many of the Muslim scholars I discussed in my thesis usually deal with certain aspects of Islam in respect to religious diversity and leave the rest. I remember, for instance, Ayoub's silence about certain questions when I interviewed him in Birmingham, May 1998. I questioned him repeatedly about how to understand certain problematic issues mentioned in the Qur'an, such as the Virgin birth and the creation story; shall we say that they are metaphorical (not intended to state a fact, but a story told to give lessons) or mythical (and should be dropped all together), or is there another way of explaining them? To provide answers to these questions goes beyond the aim and limits of my study, but, I think, a careful examination of the data by using a hermeneutical approach may provide different answers.

6.3. Prospects and Proposals

It is my hope that this work may give rise to new research in the field at three levels.

1. *At the Islamic Level*: Previous limited works by Aslan (Hick compared with Nasr) and Özcan (a passing reference to Hick) on Islam and Hick's pluralism have concluded that it was unsuitable for an Islamic context as an hypothesis in dealing with other religions. Our study has found the opposite, that with certain modifications, it could be a workable model and was compatible with Islam. Naturally, there will certainly be others who disagree with our findings and conclusions. But, on Muslims' part, this will only show the need for more work on pluralism, specifically focusing on certain problems, e.g. hermeneutics, revelation, and the case of primitive religions, etc.

2. *At the Philosophical Level*: My main disagreement with Hick's philosophy of religions arose with my insistence on the *moderate ineffability* of the Real rather than the strong version that puts it beyond language and human conception. Hick, and probably some others, will disagree with my proposal on the grounds that it leads to ascribing contradictory attributes to the Real. As I stated earlier, when put together, certain known qualities of the Real, common to world religions, may be incommensurable, but I believe they are not contradictory. This is an issue, one among many, for further exploration from a philosophical view point.

3. *At the Global Level*: What are the benefits and what can be the contributions of moderate pluralism to the religious communities of the world today? I believe that particularly in the area of mutual acceptance and tolerance of religions it has a lot to offer. Let us take the issue of interreligious dialogue for instance. What is needed on the part of Christians is that they should declare an unconditional acceptance of Islam as a religion, Muhammad as a prophet, the Qur'an as a divine revelation of God. This point is well expressed by Watt in "*Islam and the West*"[1] where he clearly states that "when a Christian today enters into dialogue with Muslims, he must do so on the basis of accepting Islam as genuine religion and Muhammad as inspired by God."[2] Unfortunately, the Crusade mentality which views Muslims as a "destructive force," "against 'tolerance'" and "human rights," and ready to wage a "'holy war' against 'Christian fellowship' and 'against Europe'"[3] can be documented even in the 1990s.[4] Thus it is ironic that even the present Pope John Paul II in his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* avoids discussing either the prophethood of Muhammad or the Qur'an in a chapter entitled "Muhammad," but instead he mentions only Muslims and Islam and does not provide anything new which Vatican II had not already said.[5] In fact, a recent study on Christian understandings of Muslims speculates that there is a growing tendency among some Catholic authorities to "go back to the pre-Vatican II period in which good Muslims were regarded as anonymous Christians or as those who had an implicit faith in the Church."[6] Even Arkoun, probably the most modern of contemporary Muslim scholars, protests against the exclusion of Islam from the "Judeo-Christian vision" of "salvation history." His criticism is directed not only to theological bodies but also to academia.[7]

My point is that polite diplomacy, in both parties, should leave its place to genuine acceptance and tolerance if we expect to see real progress and co-operation between religions, particularly Christianity and Islam, which seem to be sharing the latest problems the world is facing and still faces, for example, the Gulf War, Bosnia, Kosovo, etc. Unfortunately, neither the Pope nor the Orthodox Church leaders, nor, indeed, the World Council of Churches, made any appeal to politicians and army chiefs, or organised demonstrations, against the butchering of innocents civilians (Muslims, Christians and others) in these wars. Although the Pope and the Church leaders usually produce the

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[1] Watt, W M, *"Islam and the West,"* in Islam in the Modern World, ed. D MacEoin and A al-Shahi, London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1983.

[2] Watt, *"Islam and the West,"* 2. He furthermore points out another very important matter concerning language. He finds it absurd "to suppose that Christians worship God and Muslims Allah," because "Allah is simply the Arabic word for God and is used by several million Arabic-speaking Christians" (2).

[3] Siddiqui, A, *"Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Problems and Challenges,"* Encounters- Journal of Inter-Cultural Perspectives 2, no. 2, 1996, 130-131.

[4] For the role of media on creating this negative image see: Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, Chp. vi, "The evil demon: the media as master", 222-265.

[5] Paul II, J, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, trans. McPhee, Jenny and Martha McPhee, London: Jonathan Cape, 1994, 91-94.

[6] Aydin, *Modern Western Christian Theological Understandings of Muslims*, 320.

[7] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 8.

excuse of the religious and politics division in the secular Western democracies (i.e. their hands are tied) in real life even the basic condemnation of murdering innocent civilians would make big differences. As spiritual leaders their words are taken quite seriously and will be effective, both in the short and long runs. Furthermore, when it is necessary to defend the rights of Christians in Muslim countries, the Pope, for instance, expresses his opinion adamantly without paying much attention to the division of religion and politics.[8]

As I see it, the main problem with the sincerity of the whole inter-religious dialogue, as Nasr also says vis-a-vis the freedom of worship in the West for Muslims,[9] is due to the fact that the movement did not originate from the religions themselves, neither Christianity nor Islam nor any other religion. Rather, it was imposed on them because of the pressure they were under from modern times, intellectuals, politicians, humanists, etc. It was pushed through by outside factors, and that is why it is going very slow and, so far, is very ineffective. I still believe that none of the religious institutions, especially the Vatican and the World Council of Churches, is taking the issue seriously. The main evidence for this, as Nasr rightly puts it, is the fact that "the central issue of the acceptance by Christianity and Islam of each other as veritable revelations, without destroying the traditional meaning of revelation (the *wahy* of the Islamic tradition) has not been totally settled."[10]

On Islam's part, the problem is more complicated since there is no official body in the Islamic world. Bodies, such as The Organisation of Islamic Conference, are nothing more than figureheads with pretentious bureaucracies. They are totally ineffective even among the Islamic nations, never mind representing the Islamic world against other religions or setting out policies about international or interreligious crises (e.g. the Middle East and Kosovo). However, this does not remove the responsibility from the shoulders of independent Muslim states. Either independently or collectively, they should make their policies clear and live up to their, at least to some extent, pluralist heritage and develop it further, rather than resort to exclusivist, particularist and separatist understandings.

Yet, I am aware of the slowness and sluggishness of official progress on this front, especially in the still fiercely-contested realm of religious dominance. Therefore, I think Hick is right in his remark that the process of change should first start in the minds of the intellectuals, then it may spread to other components of the societies.[11] In this respect, it is my wish that if at least some of the academics accept a moderate form of pluralism as a workable framework for events, such as interreligious dialogue, and declare it with a

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[8] The Pope severely criticises the Sudanese and the Iranian governments without naming them as "*fundamentalist movements*" taking over power and describes the Christian populations' situation there as "terribly disturbing" (Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 94; see also Abu-Rabi, I, *"Pope John Paul II and Islam,"* The Muslim World 88, no. 3-4, 1998, 285-287).

[9] Nasr, S H, *"Islamic-Christian Dialogue,"* 226.

[10] Nasr, S H, *"Islamic-Christian Dialogue,"* 219. Muslims certainly accept Jesus as a major prophet, but ordinary believers of Christianity, i.e. those who believe in Incarnation and Trinity, are still left out of the salvational scheme in the eyes of the orthodox Islam, despite the compelling evidence in the Qur'an.

[11] Private letter, December 1997.

world-wide statement, the so-far-ineffective, or with little effect, interreligious dialogue may work more efficiently. Such a joint effort on the part of intellectuals, I strongly believe, will increase co-operation among the world religions to reduce, primarily, the number of evils caused by religious or non-religious disputes and intolerance, and more generally, suffering in the world through the unequal distribution of wealth, poverty, etc. Will this ever happen? Time will tell, but I trust that these kind of works will make positive contributions to this on-going and painfully slow process.

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